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THE FISH MEN**
A 'CARSON OF VENUS' STORY

MARCH
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VOLUME 3
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ADVENTURES

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VOL. 3
NO. 2

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

IT is usually the custom for editorial columns to be rather stiff-necked, and formal. It's the editor talking, usually, but sometimes it is the whole organization behind a magazine that speaks. Anyway, the reader doesn't have much part in it, beyond reading it. We want to change that. We'd like to have our readers make it a matter for argument and if we say anything you'd like to agree or disagree on, why not write this department a letter and say what you have to say? We don't want to be aloof.

ALL of which means, dear readers, that this column intends to take on a two-way tinge. You can get in on the fun, and incidentally help us write an interesting page in the Notebook by addressing anything you care to address to this column. We'll discuss it pro and con, and give our opinions to each other. We like to talk to our readers!

AS we write this, we're looking at the cartoon on this page, and no doubt you are also. A couple of ghastly goons, aren't they? Well, one of you—or is it a couple dozen?—keep on harping about love in *Fantastic Adventures*. You say: "Love has no place in this book." Well, why not? All great literature (not that we're trying to make the most common mistake of the day and trying to call pulp fiction literature with a mission, a grand and glorious mission to enlighten the benighted) is built on a foundation of human emotion. Fear, hate, jealousy, lust, ambition—all are emotions that make people something other than wooden robots. And love is the most powerful emotion of them all. So why shouldn't pulp take the hint from literature, and use those same emotions to add reality to fantasy?

EMOTIONS are the motivations of the actions of the characters in any story. Love makes a hero do great deeds; hate makes a man plot

disaster and death for the one he hates; greed makes another resort to trickery to ruin a business rival. Without those emotional stimuli, there would be no sense to the action carried on in the story. And so, we ask our writers to use the emotions. We think we're right in doing so. Don't you?

ONE of the best writers of the day, who really knows how to use emotion in his stories, is Don Wilcox, who gives us, in this issue, one of the weirdest, most effective fantasy stories we've read in many a day. It doesn't depend on staggering wonders to spur your imagination to the fantastic—it presents a single idea that grows through the whole story until it hits you right in the solar plexus with the last powerful paragraphs.

WE'RE referring to "Secret of the Stone Doll," which somehow reminds us of A. Merritt, yet is not A. Merritt, because it makes of fantasy a reality, while Merritt has a distinct "illusion" in his imaginative creations. Yet, both men are masters, and we believe you will long remember this little tale by DW.



"Look at me, darling, and tell me you love me."

WE don't know how we can proceed much further without mentioning the *piece de resistance* of this issue, the new "Carson of Venus" story, by Edgar Rice Burroughs. This is the story of which J. Allen St. John, famous artist, said: "It is the best story Burroughs has ever written." We think we can take the recommendation of this man at its face value. And this story is only one of four which will carry Carson of Venus along a glorious trail of adventure in coming issues.

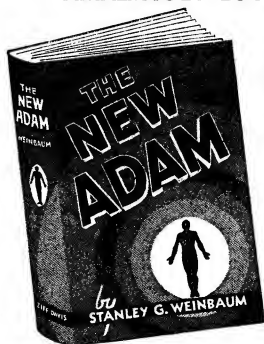
The front cover illustration of this magazine is a scene from "Slaves of the Fish Men," and it is by J. Allen St. John—masterfully so! You said the front cover of our January issue was a masterpiece. Here is another cover you can include in that category.

(Continued on page 75)

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SLAVES OF THE FISH MEN

by

**EDGAR
RICE
BURROUGHS**

**WRECKED on a strange Venusian shore,
Carson and Duare became slaves of an
uncanny race of half-human fish men**

DUARE was very quiet when we took off. I could understand why, and I could sympathize with her. Her own people, whom she loved, and her father, whom she worshipped not only as her father but as her jong, had condemned her to death because she had mated with the man she loved. They all deplored the stern law of the dynasty as much as she, but it was an inexorable commandment that not even the jong himself might evade.

I knew what she was thinking; and I laid my hand on hers, comfortingly. "They will be relieved when morning comes and they discover that you have escaped—they will be relieved and happy."

"I know it," she said.

"Then do not be sad, dear."

"I love my people; I love my country; but I may never return to them. That is why I am sad, but I cannot be sad for long; because I have you, and

I love you more than I love my people or my country—may my ancestors forgive me it."

I pressed her hand. We were silent again for a long time. The Eastern horizon was lighting faintly. A new day was breaking on Venus. I thought of my friends on Earth, and wondered what they were doing and if they ever thought of me. Thirty million miles is a great distance, but thought travels it instantaneously. I like to think that in the next life vision and thought will travel hand in hand.

"What are you thinking?" asked Duare.

I told her.

"You must be very lonely sometimes, so far from your own world and your friends," she said.

"Quite the contrary," I assured her. "I have you; and I have many good friends in Korva, and an assured position there."



Slowly, cautiously, so as not to awaken the sleeping Earthmen, the Venusian's webbed hand reached out

"You will have an assured position in that Heaven of yours of which you have told me, if Mephis ever gets hold of you," she said.

"I forgot. You do not know all that transpired in Korva."

"You have told me nothing. After all, we haven't been together for very long—"

"And just being together seemed enough, didn't it?" I interrupted.

"Yes, but tell me now."

"Well, Mephis is dead; and Taman is now jong of Korva." I told her the whole story in detail and of how Taman, having no son, adopted me in gratitude for my having saved the life of his only daughter, the Princess Nna.

"So now you are Tanjong of Korva," she said, "and if Taman dies you will be jong. You have done well, Earthman."

"I am going to do even better," I said.

"Yes! What?"

I drew her to me and kissed her. "That," I said. "I have kissed the sacrosanct daughter of an Amtorian jong."

"But you have done that a thousand times. Are all Earthmen as silly?"

"They all would be if they could."

Duare had put her melancholy from her; and we joked and laughed, as we flew on over the vast Amtorian sea toward Korva. Sometimes Duare was at the controls, for by now she was an excellent pilot, and sometimes I. We often flew low to observe the strange and savage marine life which occasionally broke the surface of the sea—huge monsters of the deep, some of which attained the dimensions of an ocean liner. We saw millions of lesser creatures fleeing before fearsome carnivorous enemies. We saw titanic battles between monstrous leviathans—the age-old struggle for survival which must exist upon every planet of the Universe upon which life exists; the reason, perhaps,

VENUS, at its nearest approach to Earth, is still a little matter of twenty-six million miles away—barely a sleeper jump in the vast reaches of infinite space. Hidden from our sight by its cloak of enveloping clouds, during all time its surface has been seen by but a single Earth man—Carson of Venus.

This is the fourth story of the adventures of Carson of Venus on the Shepherd's Star, as narrated by him telepathically to Edgar Rice Burroughs at Lanikai on the Island of Oahu. It is a story complete in itself. It is not necessary even to read this footnote, unless you happen to be curious to learn how Carson navigated interplanetary space and something of the strange lands he has visited, the vast, deserted oceans he has navigated, the savage beasts he has encountered, the friends and enemies he has made, and the girl whom he won over apparently insuper-

able obstacles.

When Carson of Venus took off from Guadalupe Island off the west coast of Mexico in his giant rocket ship his intended destination was Mars. For more than a year his calculations had been checked and rechecked by some of the ablest scientists and astronomers in America, and the exact moment of his departure had been determined, together with the position and inclination of the mile long track along which the rocket ship would make its take-off. The resistance of the Earth's atmosphere had been nicely calculated, as well as the Earth's pull and that of the other planets and the Sun. The speed of the rocket ship in our atmosphere and beyond had been as accurately determined as was scientifically possible; but one factor had been overlooked. Incomprehensible as it may appear, no one had taken into consideration the

why there must always be wars among nations—a cosmic *sine qua non* of life.

If you will look at any good map of Venus you will see that the land mass called Anlap, lies northwest of the island of Vepaja, from which Duare and I had just escaped. On Anlap lies Korva, the friendly country toward which I pointed the nose of our plane.

Of course there is no good map of Venus, at least none that I ever have seen; because the scientists of the southern hemisphere of the planet, the hemisphere to which Chance carried my rocket ship, have an erroneous conception of the shape of their world. They believe that Amtor, as they call it, is shaped like a saucer and floats upon a sea of molten rock. This seems quite evident to them, for how else might the spewing of lava from the craters of volcanoes be explained?

They also believe that Karbol (Cold Country) lies at the periphery of their

saucer; whereas it is, as a matter of fact, the Antarctic region surrounding the south pole of Venus. You may readily perceive how this distorts their conception of actual conditions and is reflected in maps, which are, to say the least, weird. Where actually the meridians of longitude converge toward the pole, their conception would be that they converged toward the Equator, or the center of their saucer, and that they were farthest apart at the periphery of the saucer.

It is all very confusing to one who wishes to go places on the surface of Amtor and must depend upon an Amtorian map, and it seems quite silly; but then one must bear in mind the fact that these people have never seen the heavens; because of the cloud envelopes which enshroud the planet. They have never seen the Sun, nor the planets, nor all the other countless suns which star the skies by night. How then might

pull of the Moon!

Shortly after the take-off, Carson realized that he was already off his course; and for some time it appeared likely that he would score a direct hit upon our satellite. Only the terrific velocity of the rocket ship and the pull of a great star saved him from this; and he passed over the Moon by the narrowest of margins.

After that, for a long month, he realized that he was in the grip of the Sun's attraction and that he was doomed. He had long since given up hope, when Venus loomed far ahead and to his right. He realized that he was going to cross her orbit and that there was a chance that she might claim him rather than the Sun. Yet he was still doomed, for had not Science definitely proved that Venus was without oxygen and incapable of supporting such forms of life as exist upon Earth?

Soon Venus seized him, and the rocket ship dove at terrific speed toward the billowing clouds of her envelope. Following the same procedure that he had purposed using in making a landing on Mars, he loosed batteries of parachutes which partially checked the speed of the ship; then he bailed out.

Landing among the branches of giant trees that raised their heads five thousand feet above the surface of the planet, he encountered almost immediately the first of the long series of adventures which have filled his life almost continuously since his advent upon Amtor, as Venus is known to its inhabitants; for he was pursued and attacked by hideous arboreal carnivores before he reached the tree city of Kooaad and became the prisoner of Mintep, the king.

It was here that he saw and loved Duare, the king's daughter, whose per- (Editor's note concludes on page 12)

they know anything of astronomy or even guess that they lived upon a globe rather than in a saucer? If you think that they are stupid, just bear in mind that man inhabited the Earth for countless ages before it occurred to anyone that the Earth was a globe; and that within recent historic times men were subjected to the Inquisition, broken on the rack, drawn and quartered, burned at the stake for holding to any such iniquitous theory. Even today there is a religious sect in Illinois which maintains that the Earth is flat. And all this in the face of the fact that we have been able to see and study the Heavens every clear night since our earliest ancestor hung by his tail in some primordial forest. What sort of astronomical theories do you suppose we would hold if we had never seen the Moon, the Sun, nor any of the Planets and myriad stars and could not possibly know that they existed?

However erroneous the theory upon which the cartographers evolved their maps, mine were not entirely useless; though they required considerable mental mathematical gymnastics to translate them into usable information, even without the aid of the theory of the relativity of distance, expounded by the great Amtorian scientist, Klufar, some three thousand years ago, which demonstrates that the actual and the apparent measurements of distance can be reconciled by multiplying each by the square root of minus one!

So, having a compass, I flew a little north of west with reasonable assurance that I should eventually raise Anlap and Korva. But how could I foresee that a catastrophic meteorological phenomenon was soon to threaten us with immediate extinction and literally hurl us into a series of situations as potentially lethal as that from which we had fled on Vepaja?

son was sacred and upon whose face no one but royalty might look and live.

He was captured by enemies of Mintep and put upon a ship that was to carry him into slavery in a far country. He headed a mutiny and became a pirate. He rescued Duare from abductors, but she still spurned his love. Again and again he befriended, protected her, and saved her life; but always she remained the sacrosanct daughter of a king.

He was captured by the Thorists, but he escaped the Room of the Seven Doors in the seaport of Kapdor. He fought with tharbans and hairy savages. He sought Duare in Kormor, the city of the dead, where reanimated corpses lived their sad, gruesome lives.

He won renown in Havatoo, the perfect city; and here he built the first aeroplane that had ever sailed the Amtorian skies. In it he escaped with

Duare after a miscarriage of justice had doomed her to death.

They came then to the country called Korvan, where Mephis, the mad dictator, ruled. Here Duare's father was a prisoner condemned to death. After the overthrow of Mephis, Duare, believing Carson dead, flew back to her own country, taking her father with her. There she was condemned to death because she mated with a lesser mortal.

Carson of Venus followed in a small sailing boat, was captured by pirates, but finally reached Kooaad, the tree city which is the capital of Mintep's kingdom. By a ruse, he succeeded in rescuing Duare; and flew away with her in the only airship on Venus.

What further adventures befell them, Carson of Venus will tell in his own words through Edgar Rice Burroughs who is at Lanikai on the Island of Oahu.—The Editor.

IT was mid-afternoon. The thing that was to change our lives was about to a sudden lightening of the cloudy sky far ahead. We noticed it simultaneously.

"What is that?" asked Duare.

"It looks as though the Sun were trying to break through the cloud envelopes of Amtor," I said. "I pray Heaven that he doesn't succeed."

"It has happened in the past," said Duare. "Of course our people knew nothing of the Sun of which you tell me. They thought it the all-enveloping fire which rose from the molten mass upon which Amtor is supposed to float. When a break came in our protective cloud envelopes, the flames struck through, destroying all life beneath the cloud rift."

I was at the controls. I banked sharply and headed north. "I am going away from there," I said. "The Sun has broken through one of the cloud envelopes; he may break through the other."

CHAPTER II

WE watched the increasing light upon our left. It illumined the whole sky and the ocean, but it was most intense at one spot. As yet it resembled only bright sunlight such as we are accustomed to on Earth; then, suddenly, it burst through like blinding flame. There had been coincidental rifts in both cloud envelopes!

Almost instantly the ocean commenced to boil. We could see it even at a distance. Vast clouds of steam arose. The heat increased at an alarming rate. It was fast becoming unendurable.

"The end," said Duare, simply.

"Not yet," I replied, as, with throttle wide, we raced toward the north. I had chosen flight to the north because

the rift was a little southwest of us and the wind was from the west. Had I turned back toward the east, the wind borne heat would have followed us. In the north lay what hope we had.

"We have lived, said Duare. "Life can hold nothing better for us than that which we have enjoyed. I am not afraid to die. Are you, Carson?"

"That is something that I shall never know until it is too late," I said, smiling down at her, "for while I live I shall never admit the possibility of death. Somehow, it doesn't seem to be for me—at least not since Danus injected the longevity serum into my veins and told me that I might live a thousand years. You see, I am curious to know if he were right."

"You are very silly," she said, "but you are also reassuring."

Enormous clouds of steam blotted out everything in the southwest. They rose to the clouds, dimming the sunlight. I could imagine the devastation in the sea, the myriad of living things destroyed. Already the effects of the catastrophe were becoming plainly discernible below us. The fleetier reptiles and fishes were fleeing the holocaust—and they were fleeing north! Instinct or intelligence, or whatever it was, it filled me with renewed hope.

The surface of the ocean was alive with them. Mortal enemies raced side by side. The stronger creatures pushed the weaker aside, the fleetier slithered over the tops of the slower. How they had been warned, I cannot guess; but the flight was on far ahead of us, though our speed was greater than the swiftest of the creatures racing with us from death.

The air was becoming no hotter; and I had hopes that we should escape unless the cloud rift enlarged and the Sun took in a larger area of Amtor's sur-

face; and then the wind changed! It blew in a sudden furious gust from the south, bringing with it stifling heat that was almost suffocating. Clouds of condensing vapor whirled and swirled about us, drenching us with moisture and reducing visibility almost to zero.

I rose in an attempt to get above it; but it was seemingly everywhere, and the wind had become a gale. But it was driving us north. It was driving us away from the boiling sea and the consuming heat of the Sun. If only the cloud rift did not widen we might hope for life.

I glanced down at Duare. Her little jaw was set; and she was staring grimly ahead, though there was nothing to see but billowing clouds of vapor. There hadn't been a whimper out of her. I guess blood will tell all right, and she was the daughter of a thousand jongs. She must have sensed my eyes upon her, for suddenly she looked up and smiled.

"More things happen to us!" she said.

"If you wished to lead a quiet life, Duare, you picked the wrong man. I am always having adventures. That's not much to brag about, though. One of the great anthropologists of my world, who leads expeditions to remote corners of the Earth and never has any adventures, says that having them is an indication of inefficiency and stupidity."

"I don't believe him," said Duare. "All the intelligence and efficiency in the world could have neither foreseen nor averted a rift in the clouds."

"A little more intelligence would probably have kept me from attempting to fly to Mars, but then I should never have known you. No; on the whole, I'm rather glad that I am no more intelligent than I am."

"So am I."

THE heat was not increasing, but the wind was. It was blowing with hurricane force, tossing our sturdy anotar about as though it were a feather. I couldn't do much about it. In such a storm the controls were almost useless. I could only hope that I had altitude enough to keep from being dashed on some mountain, and there was always the danger from the giant Amtorian forests which lift their heads thousands of feet into the air to draw moisture from the inner cloud envelope. I could see nothing beyond the nose of the anotar, and I knew that we must have covered a great distance with the terrific tail-wind that was driving us furiously toward the north. We might have passed the sea and be over land. Mountains might loom dead ahead, or the mighty boles of a giant forest. I was not very happy. I like to be able to see. If I can see, I can face almost anything.

"What did you say?" asked Duare.

"I didn't know that I said anything. I must have been thinking aloud—that I would give almost anything to be able to see."

And then, as though in answer to my wish, a rift opened in the swirling vapor ahead; and I saw. I almost leaped at the controls because of what I saw—a rocky escarpment looming high above us and dead ahead.

I fought to bank and turn aside, but the inexorable wind carried us toward our doom. No scream broke from Duare's lips, no faintest echo of the fear that she must have felt—must have, because she is human and young.

The thing that appalled me most in the split second that I had to think, was the thought of that beautiful creature being broken and crushed against that insensate cliff. I thanked God that I would not live to see it. At the foot of the escarpment we should lie together

through all eternity, and no one in all the Universe would know our resting place.

We were about to crash when the ship rose vertically scarcely a dozen yards from the cliff. As the hurricane had toyed with us before, it did again.

Of course there must have been a terrific up-draft where the roaring wind struck the face of the escarpment. It was this that saved us, combined with the fact that when I had discovered that I could not maneuver away from the cliff, I had cut my engine.

Now we rose high above a vast table land. The vapor, torn to shreds, floated off in little cloud-like wisps; and once more we could see the world below us. Once more we breathed.

But we were still far from safe. The tornado had not abated. I glanced back in the direction of the cloud rift, but now there was no brightness there. It had closed, and the danger of incineration had passed.

I opened the throttle a little in a rather futile effort to battle the elements and keep the anotar on an even keel; but we were dependent more upon our safety belts than upon our engine for salvation, for we were so tossed about that often our landing gear was above us, and we dangled helplessly in our belts.

It was a harrowing experience. A down draft would plummet us toward the ground with the velocity of a power dive; and when it seemed that we must surely crash, the giant hand of the storm would toss us high aloft.

How long we were the plaything of the Storm God, I may only guess; but it was not until almost dawn that the wind abated a little, and once more we were permitted to have some voice in the direction of our destiny; and even then we must still go where the wind willed; we could not fly against it.

For hours we had not spoken. We had made an occasional attempt, but the howling of the wind had drowned our voices. I could see that Duare was almost spent from the buffeting and the nervous strain, but there was nothing that I could do about it. Only rest could revive her, and there could be no rest until we could land.

A new world lay below us with the coming of the new day. We were skirting a great ocean, and I could see vast plains, and there were forests and rivers and, far away, snow capped mountains. I believed that we must have been driven thousands of miles toward the north, for much of the time the throttle had been wide open, and all the time that terrific wind had been at our tail.

Where could we be? I felt confident that we had crossed the Equator and must be in the north temperate zone; but where Korva lay I could not even guess, and might never know.

CHAPTER III

THE tornado died out in a last few fitful gusts. The air was suddenly calm. It was like the peace of Heaven.

"You must be very tired," said Duare. "Let me take the controls. You have been fighting that storm for sixteen or seventeen hours, and you have had no sleep for two days."

"Well, neither have you; and do you realize that we've had neither food nor water since before we left Vepaja?"

"There's a river down there, and game," said Duare. "I hadn't realized before how thirsty I was—and hungry, too. And so sleepy! I don't know which I am the most."

"We'll drink and eat, and then we'll sleep," I told her.

I circled around, looking for some sign of human habitation; for it is always men that must be feared most.

Where there are no men, one is comparatively safe, even in a world of savage beasts.

In the distance I saw what appeared to be a large inland lake, or an arm of the sea. There were little patches of forest, and the plain was tree dotted beneath us. I saw herds grazing. I dropped down to select my quarry, run it down, and shoot it from the ship. Not very sporting; but I was out for food, not sport.

My plan was excellent, but it did not work. The animals discovered us long before we were within range, and they took off like bats out of Hell.

"There goes breakfast," I said.

"And lunch and dinner," added Duare, with a rueful smile.

"The water remains. We can at least drink." So I circled to a landing near a little stream.

The greensward, close cropped by grazing herds, ran to the water's edge; and after we had drunk, Duare stretched out upon it for a moment's relaxation and rest. I stood looking around in search of game, hoping that something would come out of the nearby forest into which it had fled, effectively terminating my pursuit of it in the anotar.

It couldn't have been more than a minute or two that I stood there in futile search for food on the hoof, but when I looked down at Duare she was fast asleep. I didn't have the heart to awaken her, for I realized that she needed sleep even more than she did food; so I sat down beside her to keep watch while she slept.

It was a lovely spot, quiet and peaceful. Only the purling murmur of the brook broke the silence. It seemed very safe, for I could see to a considerable distance in all directions. The sound of the water soothed my tired nerves. I half reclined, supporting my-

self on one elbow so that I could keep better watch.

I lay there for about five minutes when a most amazing thing happened. A large fish came out of the stream and sat down beside me. He regarded me intently for a moment. I could not guess what was passing in his mind, as a fish has but one expression. He reminded me of some of the cinema stars I had seen, and I could not repress a laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded the fish. "At me?"

"Certainly not," I assured him. I was not at all surprised that the fish spoke. It seemed quite natural.

"You are Carson of Venus," he said. It was a statement, not a question.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"Taman told me. He sent me to bring you to Korva. There will be a great procession as you and your princess ride on a mighty gantor along the boulevards of Sanara to the palace of the jong."

"That will be very nice," I said; "but in the meantime will you please tell me who is poking me in the back, and why?"

AT that the fish suddenly disappeared. I looked around, and saw a dozen armed men standing over us. One of them had been prodding me in the back with a three-pronged spear. Duare was sitting up, an expression of consternation on her face. I sprang to my feet. A dozen spears menaced me. Two warriors were standing over Duare, their tridents poised above her heart. I could have drawn my pistol, but I did not dare use it. Before I could have killed them all, one of us would have been killed. I could not take the chance, with Duare's life at stake.

As I looked at the warriors, I sud-

denly realized that there was something very peculiar and inhuman about them. They had gills, and their fingers and toes were webbed. Then I recalled the fish which had come out of the stream and talked to me—I slept, and I was still dreaming! That made me smile.

"What are you smiling about?" demanded one of the warriors, "me?"

That made me laugh, for it was almost exactly what the fish had said.

"I am laughing at myself," I said. "I am having such an amusing dream."

Duare looked at me wide-eyed. "What is the matter with you, Carson?" she demanded. "What has happened to you?"

"Nothing, except that it was very stupid of me to fall asleep. I wish that I could wake up."

"You *are* awake, Carson. Look at me! Tell me that you are all right."

"Do you mean to tell me that you see what I see?" I demanded, nodding toward the warriors.

"We both slept, Carson; but now we are awake—and we are prisoners."

"Yes, you are prisoners," said the warrior who had spoken before. "Come along with us, now."

Duare arose and came and stood close to me. They did not try to prevent her. "Why do you want to make us prisoners?" she asked the warrior. "We have done nothing. We were lost in a great storm, and we landed here for food and water. Let us go our way. You have nothing to fear from us."

"We must take you to Mypos," replied the warrior. "Tyros will decide what is to be done with you. I am only a warrior. It is not for me to decide."

"Who are Mypos and Tyros?" asked Duare.

"Mypos is the king's city, and Tyros is the king." He said *jong*.

"Do you think he will let us go then?"

"No," said the warrior. "Tyros the Bloody releases no captives. You will be slaves. The man may be killed at once, or later, but Tyros will not kill you."

THE men were armed with tridents, swords, and daggers; they had no firearms. I thought I saw a possibility for Duare's escape. "I can hold them off with my pistol," I whispered, "while you make a run for the anotar."

"And then what?" she demanded.

"Perhaps you can find Korva. Fly south for twenty-four hours. You should be over a great ocean by that time; then fly west."

"And leave you here?"

"I can probably kill them all; then you can land and pick me up."

Duare shook her head. "I shall remain with you."

"What are you whispering about?" demanded the warrior.

"We were wondering if you might let us take our anotar with us," said Duare.

"What would we do with that thing in Mypos?"

"Maybe Tyros would like to see it, Ulirus," suggested another warrior.

Ulirus shook his head. "We could never get it through the forest," he said; then he turned suddenly on me. "How did you get it here?" he demanded.

"Come and get in it and I'll show you," I told him. If I could only get him into the anotar, along with Duare, it would be a long time before Ulirus would see Mypos again; and we would never see it. But Ulirus was suspicious.

"You can tell me how you did it," he countered.

"We flew it here from a country thousands of miles away," I told him.

"Flew it?" he demanded. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. We get in it, and

it flies up into the air and takes us wherever we wish to go."

"Now you are lying to me."

"Let me show you. My mate and I will take it up into the air, and you can see it with your own eyes."

"No. If you are telling me the truth about the thing, you would never come back."

Well, finally they did help me shove the anotar among a clump of trees and fasten it down. I told them their jong would want to see it, and if they let anything happen to it he'd be very angry. That got them, for they were evidently terribly afraid of this Tyros the Bloody.

We started off through the forest with warriors in front and behind us. Ulirus walked beside me. He wasn't a bad sort. He told me, in a whisper, that he'd like to let us go; but that he was afraid to, as Tyros would be sure to learn of it; and that would be the end of Ulirus. He was much interested in my blond hair and gray eyes, and asked me many questions about the country from which I came.

I was equally interested in him and his fellows. They all had beautiful physiques—smooth-flowing muscles and not an ounce of unnecessary fat; but their faces were most peculiar. Their gills I have already mentioned; these, with their protruding lips and pop eyes, resulted in a facial pulchritude of something less than zero.

"They look like fish," Duare whispered to me.

Just how piscine these Myposans were we were to learn later.

CHAPTER IV

WE followed a well marked trail through the forest, a typical Amortorian forest, a forest of exquisite loveliness. The lacquer-like bark of the

trees was of many colors, and the foliage of soft pastel shades—heliotrope, mauve, violet. Flowering parasitic plants added to the riot of color, flaunting blooms beside which our most gorgeous Earthly orchids would have appeared as drab as a church mouse at a Mardi gras.

There are many types of forest on Venus, as there are on Earth; but this through which we were passing is the most common, while the most awe inspiring and amazing are those such as cover Vepaja, the tops of which rise fully five thousand feet above the ground, and whose trees are of such enormous girth that, as at Kooaad, the palace of a king is carved within one a thousand feet from its base.

I am an inveterate worshipper of beauty; so that even though Duare and I were marching to an unknown fate, I could still be thrilled by that which met my eyes on every side. I could still wonder at and admire the gaily plumaged birds and insects and the tiny flying lizards which flitted from flower to flower in the eternal routine of pollination, but I could also wonder why Ulirus had not taken my pistol from me.

Perhaps there are few people more gifted with telepathic powers than I, yet I do not always profit by my knowledge. Had I, I should not then have thought about my pistol, for while I was wondering why Ulirus had not taken it from me, he pointed to it and asked me what it was. Of course it might have been only coincidence.

"It is a charm," I told him, "which protects me from evil."

"Let me have it," he said, holding out a hand.

I shook my head. "I wouldn't do anything like that to you, Ulirus," I said, "for you have been very decent to my mate and me."

"What do you mean?" he demanded. Several of the other warriors were looking on interestedly.

"This is my personal charm," I explained; "anyone else touching it might die." After all it was not exactly a lie. "However, if you would like to take the chance, you may." I took the weapon from its holster and proffered it to him.

He hesitated a moment. The other warriors were watching him. "Some other time," he said, "we must be getting on to Mypos now."

I glanced at Duare. She was keeping a very straight face; though she was smiling inwardly, I guessed. Thus I retained my weapon for the time being at least; and though the warriors showed no further desire to handle it, they did not lose interest in it. They kept eyeing it, but I noticed that they were very careful not to brush against it when they were close to me.

We had marched through the forest for about a mile when we came into the open again, and ahead I saw the body of water that I had seen from the anotar before I made my fateful landing. On its shore, and perhaps a mile away, was a city, a walled city.

"That is Mypos," said Ulirus. "It is the largest city in the world."

From where we stood, on slightly higher ground, I had a good view of Mypos; and should say that it covered perhaps a hundred acres. However, I didn't dispute Ulirus's claim. If he wished to believe that it was the largest city in the world, that was all right with me.

We approached a large gate which was well guarded. It was swung open when Ulirus was recognized. The officer and members of the guard gathered around us, asking many questions of our captors; and I was delighted that among the first things that they were

told was of the magical charm that I carried, which dealt death to whomever else touched it.

"They curl up like worms and die in horrible convulsions," explained Ulirus. Ulirus was quite a propagandist, however unintentionally.

Nobody, it seemed, wished to touch it.

"Now," I said, "I wish that you would take us at once to Tyros."

Ulirus and the officer appeared astounded. "Is the man mad?" demanded the latter.

"He is a stranger," said Ulirus. "He does not know Tyros."

"My mate and I," I explained, "are of the royal family of Korva. When the jong dies, I shall be jong. The jong of any other country should receive us as befits our rank."

"Not Tyros," said the officer. "Perhaps you do not know it, but Tyros is the only real jong in the world. All the others are imposters. You had better not let Tyros know that you claim to be related to a jong. He would have you killed immediately."

"What are you going to do with us, then?" I asked.

Ulirus looked at the officer as though for instructions.

"Take them to the slaves' compound at the palace," he directed; "they look fit to serve the jong."

SO Ulirus marched us off again. We passed along narrow, crooked streets flanked by one storied houses built of frame or limestone. The former were of roughly split planks fastened to upright framework, the latter of carelessly hewn blocks of limestone. The houses were as crooked as the streets. Evidently they had been built by eye without benefit of plumb-line. The windows and doors were of all sizes and shapes and all manner of crookedness. They

might have been designed by a modernist of my world, or by a child of five.

The city lay, as I later learned, on the shore of a great freshwater lake; and as we approached the lake front we saw buildings of two stories, some with towers. The largest of these is the palace of Tyros.

The compound to which we were taken adjoined the palace grounds. Several hundred tiny cells bounded an open court, in the center of which was a pool. Just before we were admitted, Ulirus leaned close to me.

"Do not tell anyone that you are the son of a jong," he whispered.

"But I have already told you and the officer at the gate," I reminded him.

"We will not tell," he said, "but the slaves might in order to win favor."

I was puzzled. "And why won't you tell?" I asked.

"For one reason, I like you; for another, I hate Tyros. Everyone hates Tyros."

"Well, I thank you for the warning, Ulirus; but I don't suppose I can ever do anything to repay you;" then the guard opened the gate and we were ushered into our prison.

There must have been fully three hundred slaves in the compound, mostly creatures like ourselves; but there were also a few Myposans. The latter were common criminals, or people who had aroused the ire of Tyros the Bloody. The men and women were not segregated from one another; so Duare and I were not separated.

Some of the other slaves gathered around us, animated by curiosity, a part of which was aroused by Duare's great beauty and a part by my blond hair and gray eyes. They had started to question us when the officer who had admitted us strode into the compound.

"Look out!" whispered one of the slaves. "Here comes Vomer," then they

drifted away from us.

VOMER walked up to me and eyed first me and then Duare from head to feet. His bearing was obviously intentionally insulting.

"What's this I hear," he demanded, "about something that you ride in that flies through the air like a bird?"

"How should I know what you heard?" I retorted.

One couldn't tell, from their facial expressions, the mental reactions of these Myposans; because, like true fish, they didn't have any. Vomer's gills opened and closed rapidly. Perhaps that was a sign of rage or excitement. I didn't know, and I didn't care. He annoyed and disgusted me. He looked surprisingly like a Moon Fish, numbers of which I had seen seined off the Florida Keys.

"Don't speak to me in that tone of voice, slave," shouted Vomer; "don't you know who I am?"

"No, nor what."

Duare stood close to me. "Don't antagonize him," she whispered; "it will only go the harder with us."

I realized that she was right. For myself, I did not care; but I must not jeopardize her safety. "Just what do you wish to know?" I asked in a more conciliatory tone, though it griped me to do it.

"I want to know if Ulirus spoke the truth," he said. "He told me that you rode in a great thing that flew through the air like a bird, and the other warriors with him said the same thing."

"It is true."

"It can't be true," objected Vomer.

I shrugged. "If you know it can't be true, why ask me?"

Vomer looked at me steadily with his fishy eyes for a moment; then he turned and strode away.

"You have made an enemy," said

Duare.

"They are all our enemies," I said. "I should like to punch his face."

A slave standing near smiled. "So should we all," he said. He was a nice looking chap, well put up; a human being and not a freak of nature like the Myposans. I had noticed him before. He had been surreptitiously eying me. It was evident that my appearance had aroused his curiosity. "My name is Kandar," he said, by way of opening up a conversation with me. "I am from Japal."

"I am Carson of Venus," I told him. "I am a citizen of Korva."

"I have never heard of such a country, and I have never before seen a man with hair and eyes the color of yours. Are all the men of Korva like you?"

I tried to explain the matter to him; but of course he couldn't grasp the fact that there was another world far from Amtor, nor could he readily accept my statement that Korva lay thousands of miles to the south.

"In that direction lies the edge of Amtor," he objected, "not more than four or five hundred kob; and no country could exist beyond that, where all is fire and molten rock."

So he, too, thought that his world was flat; but at that his was a more tenable theory than that of the inhabitants of the southern hemisphere.

I questioned him about our captors and the treatment that we might expect from them.

"Our work ashore is not heavy," he explained, "and we are not treated so very badly; but at sea—that is different. Pray that you are not sent to sea."

CHAPTER V

THE slaves, other than the Myposans, were from various coun-

tries—mysterious lands with strange names; lands which lay east and west and north, but none that lay south. That was the *terra incognita*, the land of terror into which no one ever ventured.

Nearly all of the slaves had been captured after being shipwrecked on the shores of the great lake on which the city of Mypos lay, or on the coast of an ocean which they said lay about ten miles from the city.

Kandar told me that the lake was about five hundred miles long and that Mypos lay close to the lower end of it and Japal at the upper end.

"We of Japal," he said, "trade with several friendly countries which lie along the coast of the great sea, and we have to pass Mypos on our voyages. Sometimes we are wrecked and sometimes a ship of Japal is attacked by the Myposans and captured. Most of the wrecks occur where the lake empties into the ocean through a narrow channel. Only at high tide can a ship pass through the channel from the ocean to the lake, for at low tide the waters of the lake rush madly into the ocean; and no ship can make headway against the current. When the tide is high the waters of the ocean flow into the lake, and then a passage can be made."

Duare and I had a little cubicle to ourselves, and we only hoped that they would leave us together until I could perfect some plan of escape. We slaves were fed twice a day—a stew of something that looked a little like shrimp and which also contained chopped tubers and flour made from the ground seeds of a plant which grows in profusion with little or no cultivation.

Kandar said it might not be very palatable, but that it was nutritious and strength giving. Occasionally meat was added to the stew. "They want us to be strong," Kandar explained, "so

that we can do more work. We build their ships and their houses and row their galleys; till their fields, carry their burdens. No Myposan does any work if he has sufficient slaves."

The day following our capture Vomer came into the compound with some warriors and selected a number of male slaves, whom he ordered to accompany him. Kandar and I were among them. We were marched down to the waterfront, where I had my first glimpse of Myposan ships. Some of them were quite large, being over a hundred feet in length. They were equipped with sails as well as oars. The largest, which lay at anchor, sheltered by a rude breakwater, I took to be warships. These were biremes, with large, flat overhanging decks above the upper bank of oars, capable of accommodating hundreds of warriors. There was a small deck house both fore and aft, upon the tops of which were mounted some sort of engine, the purpose of which I could not determine but which I was to learn later greatly to my discomfort and sorrow.

I asked Kandar if the Myposans had any motor driven ships, but he did not know what I meant. This aroused my curiosity, and further questioning confirmed my suspicion that we had been carried far north of the Equator into what was, to the inhabitants of the southern hemisphere, the terra incognita of Venus, where an entirely different culture prevailed. Everything here was quite different, there being nothing to compare with the advanced civilization of Vepaja, Korva, or Havatoo, the countries with which I was most familiar.

There were signs of old age and disease here among both the Myposans and their prisoners, indicating that they knew nothing of the longevity serum of the south. Their weapons and customs

differed widely. Their language, however, was similar, though not identical with that of the southern peoples.

VOMER put us to work loading a barge with rock that was to be used to strengthen the breakwater. He walked among us with a sort of bull whip, flicking first one and then another on bare legs and bodies. The act was purely sadistic, as the best workers received as many lashes as the shirkers. I saw that he had his eyes on me, and that he was slowly working his way toward me. I wondered if he would dare.

At last he came within striking distance of me. "Get to work, slave!" he growled, and swung his whip hand back for a terrific blow.

I dropped the rock I had lifted; and faced him, my hand upon the butt of my pistol. Vomer hesitated, his gills fluttering rapidly—a sign of rage or excitement in these strange creatures, who have no facial muscles with which to register emotion.

The warriors with us, and the other slaves, were watching. Vomer was on a spot, and I wondered what he would do. His reaction was quite typical of the petty tyrant and bully. "Get to work!" he blustered, and turned and struck another slave.

The warriors were staring at him with fishy eyes. One couldn't tell what they were thinking, but the second-in-command didn't leave me in doubt long.

"Give me your whip," he said to Vomer. "If you are afraid to punish the slave, I am not." The fellow had a most repulsive countenance, looking not at all unlike a sculpin with whiskers. His gills were palpitating, and I could see that he meant business.

"Who said I was afraid?" demanded Vomer.

"I do," said the warrior.

"I am in command here," blustered Vomer. "I can punish a slave, or not, as I please. If you are so anxious to punish him, take my whip."

The fellow seized it, and came toward me.

"Hadn't you better tell him about this?" I said to Vomer, tapping my pistol.

"What about it?" demanded the warrior.

"It kills," I said. "It can kill you before you can strike me."

The fellow's protruding lips formed an O, and he sucked air in noisily through his teeth. It was a Myposan laugh. When angry, they often reverse the operation and blow the air out with a whistling sound. He continued to advance upon me.

"I don't want to kill you," I said; "but if you attempt to strike me with that whip, I will."

My only reason for not wishing to kill him was based upon the certainty of reprisal that might jeopardize Duare's safety. Otherwise, I should have been glad to kill him and all his kind.

"You'd better use you trident on him," cautioned another warrior.

"I've whipped slaves to death before," boasted the fellow, "and I can whip this one to death;" then he rushed at me with upraised whip.

I whipped out my pistol, the r-ray pistol that destroys flesh and bone; and let him have it. There was no smoke, nothing visible; just a sharp staccato buzz; then there was a great hole in the center of the fellow's face; and he sprawled forward, dead.

All about me the slaves stood, wide eyed and terrified; and the gills of the fish-men opened and closed rapidly. The warrior who had advised the dead man to use his trident, raised his weapon to hurl it at me; and he went down too, with a hole in his heart.

I swung around then, so that I was facing them all. They looked at Vomer, as though awaiting orders. He hesitated. I let the muzzle of my pistol swing in his direction.

"Get to work, slaves," he said, "we have wasted enough time." Both his voice and his knees shook.

Kandar was working beside me. "One of us must always keep an eye on him," he said; "otherwise he'll get you when your back is turned. I'll help you watch."

I thanked him. I felt that I had a friend.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN we got back to the slaves' compound Kandar told Duare what had happened. I would have stopped him could I have done so, for the poor girl had enough to worry about as it was.

"I knew that you had made an enemy of Vomer," she said, "the very first time he came out to speak to you. This thing had to come. It is just as well that it is over, so that we may know where we stand."

"If I could get an audience with Tyros," I said, "it is possible that we might receive better treatment—even our release."

"What makes you think so?" inquired Kandar.

"He is a jong, and it seems reasonable to believe that he would accord to people of our station in life the ordinary amenities of decent and civilized society. My mate is the daughter of a jong, and I am the son of one." I referred to my adoption by Tahan, Jong of Korva.

Kandar smiled and shook his head. "You do not know Tyros," he said, "nor the psychology of the Myposans. They consider themselves a superior race and

the rest of us on a par with the beasts. I have even heard them voice their wonder that we are endowed with speech. It is Tyros' ambition to conquer the world, carrying the Myposan culture to all benighted races and at the same time enslaving or destroying them. He is well aware of the fact that I am the eldest son of the Jong of Japal, yet I receive no better treatment than the meanest slave. No, my friend, it would do you no good to have an audience with Tyros, even if you could obtain one, which, of course, you cannot. The best that you can do is hope for the impossible."

"And what is that?" asked Duare.

"Escape."

"You think that that is impossible?" I asked.

"Well, let us say improbable," Kandar replied; "for after all nothing is impossible to the man of imagination and initiative, such as I assume you to be."

"And may we count on your co-operation?" I asked.

"Absolutely. I do not intend remaining a slave here indefinitely. Death would be far preferable."

"You have been here longer than we," I said. "You must have given much thought to escape. Perhaps you already have a plan."

"I wish I had," he replied, "but you will find it difficult to plan, where one is not the master of one's simplest acts and where one is constantly under the watchful eyes of armed warriors and traitorous spies."

"Spies?" asked Duare. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that among the slaves there are always those who will inform against their fellows in the hope of currying favor with their masters. You cannot be too careful with whom you discuss even your hopes. You do not

even know that I am not a spy," he added with a smile.

"I'll take a chance on that," I told him. "I think I am a sufficiently good judge of human nature to know a man of honor even upon only short acquaintance."

"Thank you, but don't be too sure," he laughed, which made me all the surer of him.

I LIKED Kandar, and so did Duare.

He was quite genuine—the sort of fellow you might meet in the officers' club at Schofield or San Diego. Had he not been captured by the Myposans he would one day have been jong of Japal; and he probably had a family tree the roots of which reached way back into antiquity, as did those of most of the royal families of Amtor with which I was acquainted.

Unlike the Polynesians, whose genealogies were handed down by word of mouth for hundreds of years and are all mixed up with myth and legend, these people had a written language; and the records were true and exact for ages. On my mother's side, I can trace my ancestry back to Deacon Edmund Rice, who came to Sudbury, Massachusetts, about 1639; and from him to Cole Codoveg, who was King of Briton in the third century; yet, by comparison with Duare or Kandar or Taman, I am a parvenu.

These people are extremely proud of their ancestry, yet they can still accept others at their face value, regardless of their background.

About mid-forenoon of the day following my encounter with Vomer, he came swaggering into the compound with a number of warriors—his bodyguard, I called them; for I was quite sure, that, hated as he was, he dared not come alone among the slaves.

In a loud voice he summoned Duare

to step forward. Instantly I was alert and antagonistic. I didn't know what he wanted of Duare; but whatever it was, I was against it; so I stepped up beside her.

"I didn't call *your* name, slave," growled Vomer in the most insulting tone of voice he could conjure.

I said nothing.

"Back to your kennel, slave!" he shouted.

"Not until I know what you want of my mate," I told him.

His gills flapped, and he pursed his hideous lips and blew out air like a spouting whale. The flapping of the gills by these Myposans has an almost obscene sound, and the blowing of air when they are angry is equally disgusting. But, disgusting or not, it was quite evident that Vomer was angry; and I could endure his obnoxious manifestation of anger for the pleasure that it gave me to have made him angry. As you may have gathered, I did not like Vomer.

He took a step toward me, and then hesitated; then he looked at his warriors; but they were looking the other way. Evidently they had heard of or seen the lethal possibilities of the r-ray.

Between his flapping gills and his blowing, he had difficulty in controlling his voice; but he managed to scream, "Carson of Venus, step forward!"

"I am already here," I said. This he ignored.

"Kandar of Japal, step forward!" he wheezed. He would probably have liked to bellow; but his gills were still flapping, and he was still blowing spasmodically, which would, naturally, interfere with bellowing. I had to laugh.

"What are you laughing at, slave?" It was only a gurgle.

Duare laid a hand upon my arm before I could reply. She has far more sense than I. I wanted very much to

say that I had seen moon fish seined off the Florida keys; but that I had never before seen moon fish with whiskers; and that I thought them very amusing.

Vomer called a couple of more names, and the slaves stepped forward and took their places beside us; then he told us to fall in and follow him. The warriors formed before and behind us, and we left the slaves' compound and marched out into the narrow streets of the city. Where were we going! To what new scenes, what new adventures, what new dangers were we being conducted?

CHAPTER VII

THE streets of Mypos are narrow and winding. As the Myposans have neither wheeled vehicles nor beasts of burden, their streets need not be wide; and the fact that they are narrow and winding would make the city easier to defend in the event of invasion. A single stalwart Horatius might hold any one of them against a greatly superior force.

In many places our little party of slaves and warriors was compelled to move in single file, the pedestrians we met flattening themselves against the walls of the buildings as we squeezed past. And so we progressed to an open plaza near the water front. Here there were a number of Myposans surrounding a small platform, near which we were halted. Immediately a number of the Myposans congregated there came among us and commenced to examine us, and one with a huge beard mounted the platform. One of those who moved among us attracted his attention and touched Duare on the shoulder.

The bearded one caught Vomer's eye. "Bring the woman to the platform," he directed.

I waited as Vomer led Duare up the three or four steps to where the other man stood. What was going to happen? I did not know, but I had my suspicions.

"What do you know of this woman?" asked the man of Vomer.

The fellow who had touched Duare's shoulder moved forward to the platform, and the others crowded about him.

"She was captured beyond the forest with a man who says that she is a jan-jong in some country of which no one ever heard," replied Vomer. "Beyond that I know nothing of her. She has behaved well, but the man is insubordinate and dangerous. He is down there," and he pointed to me. The man with the large beard fixed his fishy eyes upon me, while Vomer whispered to him earnestly. They spoke together thus for a moment, and then Vomer left the platform.

The man standing beside Duare looked down on the little crowd below him. "Who wishes to buy this fine female slave?" he asked.

So that was it! Well, I had guessed correctly; but what was I going to do about it?

"I will buy her!" said the man who had touched Duare.

I could kill many of them with my pistol; but eventually they would overpower me; and Duare would be, if anything, worse off.

"What will you pay?" demanded the auctioneer.

"One hundred kloovol," replied the man.

A vol has about the same purchasing power as our fifty-nine cent dollar. Kloo is the prefix forming the plural. So this creature had dared to appraise Duare, daughter of a thousand jongs, at fifty-nine dollars! I fingered the butt of my pistol longingly.

"And who will pay more?" asked the

auctioneer.

"Yes, who?" grumbled a Myposan standing near me. "Who would dare bid against Kod, who buys for Tyros?" He spoke in a very low voice to one who stood near him.

There were no other bids, and Duare was knocked down to Kod. I was furious. Duare was to be taken away from me; and, worse still, she was to become the chattel of a heartless tyrant. All my moderate intentions went by the board. I determined to fight it out, killing as many as I could, seize Duare and blast my way to the city gates. With any luck at all I might make it, for the element of surprise in my action would give me a great advantage.

Vomer and the warriors were pressed pretty closely around me. I had not noticed it before; but they had been closing in on me; and now, before I could put my plan into action, they leaped upon me and by weight of numbers bore me to the ground. It was evidently the fruit of Vomer's whispered conversation with the auctioneer.

Before I could whip out my pistol they bound my hands behind my back, and I was helpless. They did not take my weapon from me, and I knew why. I had said that whoever touched it would die, and they believed me.

WHILE I was down Vomer kicked me in the ribs, and after they had jerked me to my feet he struck me in the face. I don't know how much further he would have gone had not the auctioneer commanded him to desist.

"Do you want to ruin a valuable piece of property?" he cried.

"I wouldn't give one vol for him," snapped Vomer.

I was smarting under the indignities that Vomer had heaped upon me, but I was more concerned about Duare's future. The man, Kod, was leading her

away; and she was looking back at me with a brave little smile.

"I shall come for you, Duare!" I cried after her. "Somehow, some way, I shall come."

"Silence, slave!" snapped Vomer.

Kandar was standing near me. "Duare is fortunate," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"She was bought for Tyros," he replied.

"And what is fortunate about that?" I demanded. "It seems to me to augur a future worse than death for a woman such as Duare."

"You are mistaken. She will serve one of the women of the royal family."

"Not after Tyros has seen her," I argued.

"Skabra will see her, and Skabra will see that Tyros does not get her."

"Who is Skabra?" I asked.

"Tyros' mate, the Vadjong of Mypos—a she-tharban and a jealous one. You need have no fear that Duare will fall into the hands of Tyros while Skabra lives; she is too beautiful. Were she ill-favored, Skabra might let Tyros have her."

Well, that offered a ray of hope; and I was thankful for even the slightest glimmer.

Just then a man came and touched Kandar on the shoulder, and he went to the slave block. A number of Myposans swarmed around him, feeling of his muscles, examining his teeth.

The bidding for Kandar was spirited. He brought three hundred fifty Kloovol—three and one half times as much as Duare; but then he was a strong, husky man; and as he was not being bid in by an agent of Tyros, the bidding was open to all.

After Kandar had been purchased, the man who had bought him touched me on the shoulder; and it was turn to go to the block. I went with my hands

bound tightly behind my back.

"Who wishes to buy this fine male slave?" he droned.

No one spoke. There was no bid. The auctioneer waited a moment.

"He is very strong," he said. "He has fine teeth. I have examined them myself. He could do a great deal of work for many years. I am sure that he is quite as intelligent as any members of the lower orders. Who wishes to buy him?"

Again there was silence. "It is too bad to destroy such a fine slave," urged the auctioneer. Almost, he had tears in his eyes. And that was understandable, since he received a commission on every slave sold, and every unsold slave was a blot on his escutcheon.

Suddenly he got quite angry. "Why did you touch him?" he almost screamed at the man who had laid a hand on my shoulder.

"I didn't touch him for purchase," snapped the fellow; "I only wanted to see if his flesh was firm—just a matter of curiosity."

"Well, you had no business to do it. Now you will have to bid on him. You know the law of the slave market."

"Oh, all right," said the fellow. "I don't want him, but I'll pay ten kloovol for him."

"Anybody else crave this fine male slave?" inquired the Auctioneer.

It seemed that no one did. "Very well," he said, "this fine male slave has been sold to the agent of Yron for ten Kloovol. Take him away!"

So I had been sold for five dollars and ninety cents! That was certainly a blow to my ego. It is a good thing that I have a sense of the ridiculous.

CHAPTER VIII

WELL, at least I would not be separated from Kandar; and that

was something, for he had been in Mypos long enough to become more or less familiar with the city and the manners and customs of its inhabitants. If an opportunity for escape arose he would be invaluable as an ally.

Yron's agent motioned us to accompany him; and Kandar started to comply, but I stood still.

"Come, slave!" commanded the agent. "What are you standing there for? Come with me!" He raised a whip he carried, to strike me.

"My wrists are bound," I said.

"What of it?" he demanded. "Come along!"

"Not until you free my hands," I told him.

He struck me then with his whip. "Get going, slave!" he cried.

"Not until my hands are freed," I said, stubbornly; then he struck me again; whereupon I lay down.

The fellow became furious; and struck me again and again, but I would not budge.

"If you want your slave alive," said Kandar, "you will free his hands. He will never come until you do."

I knew that it was a hell of a way for a five-dollar and ninety-cent slave to act, but I felt that by asserting myself at the beginning I might find the going easier later.

The agent hit me a couple of more blows for good luck; then he stooped and freed my hands.

"Get up!" he ordered, and as I rose to my feet he swelled visibly, inhaling wind through his teeth. "I am a great slave driver," he said; "they always obey me."

I was glad he was satisfied, and winked at Kandar. Kandar grinned. "Be careful," he cautioned. "They make short shrift of slaves who are recalcitrant, and don't forget that you didn't cost Yron very much. He could

easily afford to do away with you."

Vomer had been standing around evidently enjoying the whipping I had received. "You shouldn't have freed his hands," he said to Yron's agent.

"Why?" demanded the fellow.

"Because now he can kill you with that thing," he explained, pointing at my pistol.

"Give it to me!" commanded the agent.

I slipped it from its holster and proffered it to him, muzzle first.

"Don't touch it!" cried Vomer. "It will kill you if you touch it."

The man drew back. He was in a quandary.

"You needn't be afraid," I told him, "you would never have touched it, and as long as you treat Kandar and me well I'll not kill you." I slipped the weapon back into its holster.

"You've bought something for Yron," said Vomer, venomously. "When he finds out what, he'll lop off your head."

I suppose the fellow was unhappy, for his gills fluttered. I couldn't tell, of course, by the expression on his face; as that never changed. Like all the rest of his kind, he had no facial muscles to reflect his moods.

"Come along, slaves!" he ordered, and led Kandar and me away.

IT was not far from the slave market to Yron's house, and we presently found ourselves in a large patio in the center of which was a pool about fifty feet wide and a hundred long. There were trees and shrubs and flowers and an expanse of lawn, all in the soft pastel shades of Amtorian verdure. Several slaves were pruning and trimming and cultivating, and there were three armed with wooden tridents standing like sentries about the pool. I noticed that these often glanced up at the sky. Naturally, I looked up also; but I saw

nothing. Glancing into the pool, I saw a few fishes swimming about; but they did not interest me—then.

Some one had notified Yron that two new slaves had arrived; and presently he came out into the patio to inspect us, much as a gentleman farmer on Earth would inspect a couple of new cows or horses.

There was nothing distinctive about Yron, except that his trappings and weapons were more ornate than those of common warriors. He looked us over carefully, felt of our muscles, examined our teeth.

"A fine specimen," he said, indicating me. "What did you have to pay for him?"

"Ten kloovol," said the agent.

"They must have paid you to take this one, then," he said, nodding toward Kandar.

I gave Kandar the laugh, then.

I think the agent was not very happy then. Casting about for an out, he said, "I was very fortunate. I got both these fine male slaves for three hundred sixty kloovol."

"You mean to tell me you paid three hundred and fifty for that," he yelled, pointing at Kandar, "when you could buy magnificent specimens like this for only ten?"

"Nobody wanted this one," said the agent. "That is why I got it so cheap. No one else bid."

"Why?" demanded Yron.

"Because he is insubordinate and dangerous. They had to tie his hands behind his back to keep him from killing people."

Yron's gills fluttered and flapped; and he blew, and he blew, and he blew, reminding me of the Big Bad Wolf in the Three Little Pigs. "So!" he fairly screamed. "So! you bought a dangerous slave that no one else would have, and you brought him here!"

"The auctioneer made me buy him," pleaded the agent; "but if you don't want him, I'll kill him and repay you the ten kloovol."

I laid my hand upon the butt of my pistol, and the agent saw the gesture.

"All right," said Yron. "Kill him."

I drew the pistol from its holster, and the agent changed his mind. "On second thought," he said, "I'll buy him from you and then resell him. Perhaps I can make some profit from him."

"Listen," I said to Yron, "this is all very foolish. If I am well treated and my friend here is well treated, I will kill no one."

"And you will work for me and obey orders?" demanded Yron.

"As long as we are well treated," I said.

"What is your name?"

"Carson."

"And yours?"

"Kandar."

Yron called to a funny looking little man whose mouth appeared to be beneath his chin. He looked like a shark. He was a sort of major domo. "Carson and Kandar," said Yron, "will go to the ship the next time we sail; in the meantime keep them around the pool and let them guard the children; and as for you," he shouted at the agent, "if this Carson causes any trouble, you'll go to the ship;" then he came and examined me closely. "Where did you come from?" he demanded. "I never saw any of your kind who looked like you. I never saw anyone with yellow hair and gray eyes before."

As there was no use trying to explain something to him that he couldn't possibly understand, I simply told him that I came from a country far to the south.

"There is no country to the south," he said, "only molten rock and fire." Yron, the great noble, walked away

and re-entered his house.

The major domo approached us. He seemed to undulate toward us. Momentarily I expected to see him roll over on his back and bite somebody, so sharklike was his appearance. He handed us each a wooden trident.

"You will remain close to the pool," he said, "until you are relieved. Let nothing harm the children. Let no one enter the pool other than Yron or one of his women. Be constantly on the lookout for gypals. Never forget that you are very fortunate to be in the service of so great a man as the noble Yron;" then he undulated away.

Kanda and I walked over beside the pool where the other three slaves were patrolling, and one of them instantly recognized Kandar and greeted him most respectfully. "You do not recognize me, of course," he said. "I was a warrior in the body-guard of Jantor, Jong of Japal, your father. My name is Artol. I am sorry to see a prince of Japal here. As I served your father, I will serve you in whatever way I can."

"We are neither common warrior nor royal prince here," said Kandar; "we are fellow slaves—Carson, Artol, and Kandar. Let us serve one another."

"Whatever you wish," replied Artol, "but you are still my Prince."

Kandar smiled and shrugged. "How came you here?" he asked.

So Artol told his story.

CHAPTER IX

"WE were twenty," he said, "twenty warriors of the Jong's own body-guard. A great ship with two banks of oars manned by a hundred slaves and carrying a huge sail for fair winds was fitted out to carry a great cargo of wares to Torlac, which lies five hundred klookob to the west on the shores of the Noellat-gerloo.

"We knew that the cargo was valuable because we twenty were sent along to guard it—twenty warriors of the Jong's own bodyguard, picked men all, from the best warriors of Japal.

"It was to be a long journey—two hundred klookob down the great Lake of Japal, five hundred klookob along the coast of the Noellat-gerloo* to Torlac; and then back—fourteen hundred klookob (3500 miles) altogether."

"But it turned out to be a short journey," said Kandar; "you came only as far as Mypos."

"On the contrary, my prince, we completed our journey to Torlac; but not without incident. While we were lying at the lower end of the Lake of Japal, waiting for the tide that would float us through the channel into the Noellat-gerloo, we were attacked by a Myposan ship of war—fifty oars and a hundred warriors.

"They slipped up upon us at night and swarmed our deck. It was a great battle, Prince—twenty against a hundred; for our galley slaves were no good to us, and the sailors of our ship were little better.

"Our officer was killed in the first clash; and I, Artol, took command. The captain of the ship, terrified, was in hiding; so the command of the ship as well devolved upon me. We fought as only the jong's bodyguard knows how to fight, but five to one are heavy odds. And then they armed their galley slaves and turned them upon us, forcing them to fight.

"Still we held our own. The decks were red with blood. As we cut them down, more threw themselves upon us—two for every one we killed; and then I saw that the tide had changed—it was

* Noellat-gerloo, the name of the ocean, means mighty water. *Ellat* is might, and the prefix *no* is identical with our suffix *y*; so *noellat* means mighty. *Gerloo* is water.—Ed.

running out of the lake into the ocean.

"So far we had been able to hold the hatch leading from the fighting deck to the deck where the galley slaves sat at their oars, and I sent a good man down there with his orders; then, with my own hands, I slipped the anchor. I shouted the command to row, and leaped to the tiller.

"The ship swung around and headed for the ocean, dragging the enemy ship with it. It was certain that one of the ships would be wrecked, and quite probably both. The Myposans ran for their own ship just as some of their fellows cut her loose from us. We were caught in the swirling rush of the waters racing from the lake into the ocean.

"I could hear the crack of the whips on the slaves' backs as the galley masters urged them to greater effort, for only by tremendous effort could they give the ship steerage way in that racing torrent.

"I am a soldier and no sailor, but I guided the ship through the channel in the darkness of night until it floated at last on the bosom of the ocean; then the captain came out of hiding and took command. Instead of thanking me for saving his ship, he berated me for slipping the anchor.

"We had words, then; and I told him that when we returned to Japal I should report to the jong himself that he had hidden all during the battle when he should have been on deck defending his ship. That is why I am here."

"But I do not understand," said Kandar.

"Wait. I am not through. Presently you shall know. When I checked up after the fight, I found that only ten of us remained; and five of these were wounded. Also, we had eleven Myposan prisoners—eleven who had been unable to reach the deck of their ship after it had been cut loose. These were sent

down to the galley masters to help man the oars.

"In due time we reached Torlac, unloaded our cargo and took on another for Japal. The return trip was uneventful until after we entered the Lake of Japal. We lay to at the lower end of the lake so that we should pass Mypos after dark, as is the custom. Then we rowed slowly and silently up the lake, with no lights showing on the ship.

"It was quite dark. One could not recognize faces on deck. There was a great deal of movement there I thought, men passing to and fro constantly. We came opposite Mypos. The lights of the city were plainly discernible.

"Some one said, 'What is that—right there to starboard?' At that, I and my warriors moved to the starboard rail. I had no more than reached it than some one seized me around the waist, leaped to the rail with me, and then into the lake.

"It was a Myposan! You know how these fellows swim, my prince. Half the time he had me under water, half drowned; but at last he dragged me ashore at Mypos, more dead than alive. When I could gather my breath and my wits I found myself in a slave compound with all my men. Later I learned the truth.

"The captain, fearful that we would report him to the jong, had liberated the Myposans with the understanding that they would take us prisoners. As a matter of fact he had stipulated that that they were to drown us, but the temptation to take us in as prisoners whom they might sell into slavery was too much for them. It saved our lives.

"So that, my prince, is how I came to be a slave in Mypos; and I live only to return to Japal and have the life of the coward and traitor who sent ten of the jong's bodyguard into slavery."

"Who was this captain?" asked

Kandar.

"His name is Gangor."

Kandar nodded. "I know much of him," he said, "but nothing good. It was rumored that he was high in the councils of the party that has long sought to overthrow the jong, my father."

That name meant nothing to me then. It was to mean much, later.

CHAPTER X

AS we three talked, the major domo came sinuously toward us, more shark-like than ever. "You stand here and talk, slaves," he accused, "when you should be watching for guypals. For this you should be beaten. Separate! Patrol the pool. If a child is harmed you all die—most unpleasantly."

So we fell to walking around the pool with the other two guards, and some of us were always looking up at the sky; though for what, I hadn't the remotest idea.

After the major domo left the patio, I fell in beside Kandar. "What are guypals?" I asked.

"They are large birds of prey," he said—"really very dangerous. If it were not for the guards they would come down and carry off the children. As it is, guards or no guards, you never can tell when they will come. If they do, some of us may be killed. They are terrific fighters and absolutely without fear."

It seemed to me a lot of foolishness, guarding children against birds, when there weren't any children nor any birds. At least I hadn't seen any. It would have been much more sensible, I thought, to let us sit down and rest until the children came out into the patio.

As guypals don't fly at night, we were

dismissed as soon as it got dark, and taken to the slaves compound, where we were fed a nasty mess and herded into a shed to sleep on filthy grass mats. Yron's slaves evidently didn't fare any too well.

I wondered about Duare. Was she being well treated? Was she safe? Would I ever see her again? I fell into a fitful sleep worrying about her.

At dawn the next day, after a vile breakfast, we were taken to the patio again and told to look out for guypals and guard the children. "If the guypals are as dangerous as you say," I remarked to Kandar, "why do they give us wooden tridents? What can we do with a piece of wood against such fierce birds?"

"All we can do is the best we can," he said. "They are afraid to arm us with metal tridents—we might turn on them. You know, these Myposans are at heart arrant cowards."

"Well, I hope I see a guypal today," I said—"anything to break the monotony. I'd even like to see one of their children—it might attract a guypal or two. Where do they keep these children of theirs, anyway?"

Kandar laughed and pointed into the pool. "There," he said. "There are the children."

I looked into the pool, but saw nothing but the few strange looking fishes I had occasionally seen the previous day. "I see nothing in there," I said, "but a few weird-looking fishes."

"Those are the children," said Kandar.

I looked at him in surprise for a moment, until I got the idea.

"I see," I said. "We have people like that in my own world; being childless, they lavish their affection on dogs and cats. These people have adopted fishes."

Kandar shook his head. "You are

quite wrong on both scores," he said. "In the first place these people have no affection to lavish on anything; and, in the second, these *are* their children," and he pointed to the fishes swimming playfully about the pool.

"You are very amusing," I said.

"I didn't intend being. I am really quite serious. You see, these fishlike creatures are really the children of Yron and his mate."

"It is incredible," I said.

"But a fact. Human beings, such as we, bring forth young that somewhat resemble themselves. Many of the beasts do likewise. Some creatures lay eggs in which the embryo develops. The Myposan females bring fish into the world—fish that eventually develop into Myposans.

"If you look closely you will see that the largest of these creatures is already developing hands and feet. Later it will slough its tail; then it will become an amphibian and crawl out on land. Slowly its head and face will change, becoming more human; it will walk erect, and it will become a Myposan; but it will still have gills as well as lungs and be partially amphibious."*

I LOOKED closely at one of the darting fishes, and plainly saw rudimentary hands and feet. Somehow it seemed shockingly obscene.

"I owe you an apology," I said to Kandar, "but I really thought that you were joking. So these are the 'children' we are guarding! The little darlings.

* Obviously, here on Venus in the land of the Myposans, evolution carries its course through each individual, much as the Earth frog develops into a creature with legs from its original fish-like form. If man, as evolution says, came up from the sea, through fishy forms, to amphibian, to reptilian, to the final mammalian, it doesn't seem impossible that evolution on another world could retain all its phases in the individual, after birth, or hatching of the egg, rather than before birth, as in the human foetus.—Ed.

Papa seems quite solicitous about their safety, but he and Mamma don't pay much attention to them otherwise."

"The Myposans are absolutely devoid of affection. They have no word for love. Their protective instinct is strong, however—a purely biological reaction against racial extinction. They will protect these little monstrosities with their lives."

"These are very young, I suppose," I said.

"They are more than a year old. The females come into their pools to spawn once a year, and give birth to thousands of tiny fishlike creatures—some say as many as a million. These almost immediately find their way out into the lake through the subterranean channels which connect all these pools with the Lake of Japal. Where they go is not definitely known; but probably out into the ocean, where those that survive remain for a year. Of course most of them are devoured by the larger denizens of the sea. In the case of Yron's mate only three survived from last year's spawning."

"These may not even be hers," I suggested.

"Oh, yes they are," Kandar assured me. "Some instinct always guides the little rascals back to the pool in which they were spawned."

"I don't see how anyone can tell," I demurred.

"Instinct again," said Kandar. "These creatures are endowed with a congenital antipathy for similar creatures devoid of identical genes. If one of another spawning should blunder into this pool in search of its own, these creatures would set upon it and either drive it out or kill it.

"The parents, especially the females, have the same instinctive power of recognition of their own. Myposan slaves have told me that it is not uncommon

for none of a females own spawning to return, all having been devoured at sea. If, in such a case, the young of another female blunders into her pool, she immediately recognizes that it is not hers and destroys it."

"I presume that is a provision of Nature to prevent inbreeding," I suggested.

"On the contrary it is a provision of Nature to insure inbreeding," said Kandar. "The Myposans never mate for offspring outside their own families. After you have been here a little longer, you will be struck by the startling family resemblances and characteristics. You will see that Yron and his mate look and act alike; and if you ever witness a gathering of the clan, you will be amazed by the remarkable resemblances."

I was about to ask some further question; what, I do not now recall, when I heard a shrill scream from overhead and the whir of wings.

"The guypals!" cried Artol.

CHAPTER XI

GUYPALS! They were large birds and ferocious. There must have been a dozen of them. They dove for us and for the pool. We poked and struck at them with our wooden tridents, and they zoomed and dove again.

People came running from the house. Yron and his mate were among them. There was a great deal of noise and a great deal of excitement. The warriors who came had metal tridents, but these the guypals eluded. They seemed to know that the wooden weapons wielded by the slaves could not do much damage.

The Myposans were blowing furiously and flapping their gills. All were screaming orders and advice. It was bedlam. The noise should have fright-

ened off almost anything. We were doing pretty well; and keeping the guypals at a distance, when one of them eluded us and dove straight for the pool. It looked as though one of Mrs. Yron's little darlings was about to get his.

You can't get up much enthusiasm about succoring a fish. At least I can't; but I had a job to do; and it was only natural that, being what I am, I should do the best I could to acquit myself worthily.

I imagine that I just don't think such things out. I act quite mechanically. Had I stopped to think, I should have said to myself, "These may be children to some; but they are just fish to me, and if I save them they will grow up to be three more enemies. I shall let them die"; but I said nothing of the kind to myself. I imagine that what crossed my mind and influenced me was a subconscious reminder that I had been given the job of protecting these creatures and that nothing else counted.

Of course it all happened in the fraction of a second. The guypal dove for the pool, and I drew my r-ray pistol and blew a hole through it. It crumpled and fell into the pool; then I turned the pistol on the others which were circling about awaiting another opportunity to elude us. Three more dropped, and the others flew away.

Yron approached me. I thought he was going to express his indebtedness to me, but he did nothing of the sort. He didn't even thank me for saving his little darlings.

"What is that thing?" he demanded.

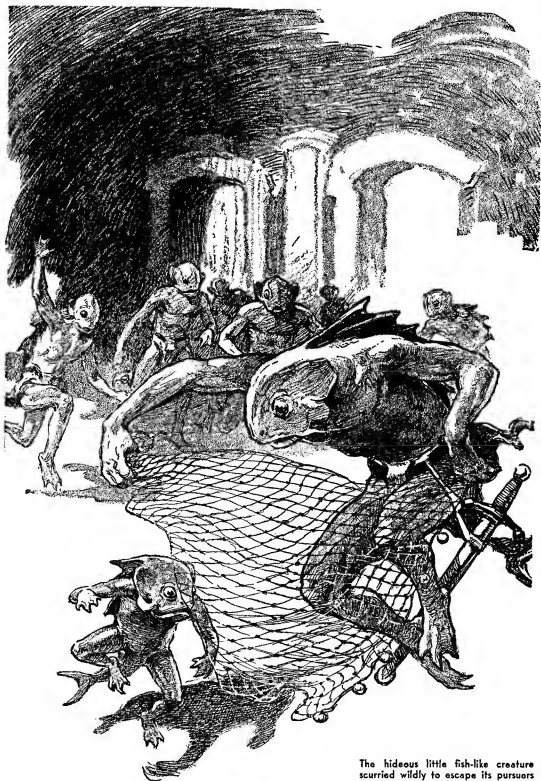
"A pistol," I replied.

"What is a pistol?" he asked.

"This," I said.

"And it killed the guypals?" he asked.

"I killed the guypals. Without me the pistol could not kill them—unless,"



The hideous little fish-like creature scurried wildly to escape its pursuers

I added, "they had touched it."

"Could it kill anything else?" he asked.

"Certainly—anything."

"Me?"

"You and all your people," I assured him.

"Give it to me, slave," he demanded.

"Certainly," I said, holding it out toward him, "but if you touch it it will kill you."

He drew back, and commenced to blow. His gills flapped. "Throw it away!" he commanded.

He might as well have asked me to cut off my right hand and throw it away. I was saving that pistol for some future emergency. You may wonder why I had never used it on these people in a break for freedom. It was because I had never yet found conditions such that I might hope to escape and take Duare with me, and I certainly had no intention of trying to escape without her.

I just grinned at Yron and shook my head. "I may need it," I said, "if the people of Mypos do not treat my mate and me well."

Yron fairly danced up and down. "Throw it away, slave!" he screamed. "I, Yron, a noble of Mypos and your master, command you."

"And I, Carson of Venus, a prince of Korva, refuse."

YOU could have heard Yron's gills flap a city block away, and he was blowing like a whale—which he didn't at all resemble. I don't know whether or not fish have high blood pressure; but I am sure Yron didn't, as otherwise he would have exploded. I think I have never seen any other creature in the throes of such a terrific rage—the more terrific because of its futility.

"Seize him!" he screamed at several of his warriors who had come to the

pool following the alarm. "Seize him and destroy that thing!"

The warriors had been interested listeners to our altercation. They had heard me say that whoever touched my pistol would die; so they came forward warily, each one intent upon permitting some one else to be first. They were very polite in this respect. There was no rude elbowing of others aside in order to be the first to seize me.

"That is close enough," I said, pointing the pistol at them.

They halted in their tracks, looking very uncomfortable.

"Spear him!" commanded Yron.

I pointed the pistol at Yron. "When the first spear is raised, you die," I told him. The warriors looked questioningly at him.

"Hold!" cried Yron. "Do not spear him—yet. Wait until I have gone."

"You are not going until you have countermanded that order," I told him. "I think that perhaps we had better discuss this matter so that there may be no more misunderstandings; they are always annoying and sometimes fatal."

"I do not discuss anything with my slaves," replied Yron, haughtily.

I shrugged. "It is all the same to me," I said, "but remember this: If my mate and my friend Kandar, here, and I are not treated well, you die. I can kill you any time I wish."

"Your mate? You have no mate here."

"Not here, but in the palace of Tyros. She was purchased for him in the slave market. You'd better advise him to treat her well. At the same time arrange to release us and return us to the place where we were captured."

"Such insolence!" he cried. "Wait until Tyros hears of this. He will have you killed."

"Not before I have killed Tyros. tell him that." I thought I might as

well play up my advantage while I could, for it was evident that he was already afraid of me.

"How can you reach Tyros in his palace?" he demanded.

"By killing every one who tries to stop me—commencing with you," I said, twirling my pistol around my index finger.

"I don't believe that you could do it; you are just boasting," said Yron.

"I shall prove it," I said, leveling my pistol at him.

At that, he dove into the pool and disappeared. I found it difficult not to laugh, he cut such an amusing figure in his fright. All the slaves and warriors were standing around watching me—at a respectful distance.

I waited for Yron to come to the surface. I was going to give him another scare, but he didn't come up. Five minutes passed, and nothing happened—except that the warriors slowly dispersed, going back into the building. Finally only we slaves remained in the patio.

"Yron must have drowned," I said to Kandar.

"By no means," replied Kandar. "He may be out in the lake by this time, or in a grotto at the bottom of the pool, or back in his palace."

"But how?" I asked.

"These people are amphibians," explained Kandar. "They can remain under water for considerable periods of time. Also, they have underwater corridors that lead from their pools out into the lake, as well as other corridors that lead to smaller pools within their palaces; and there are usually grottos, which are really parts of the pools, far under water, where they can remain in hiding, breathing through their gills."

Kandar told me a great deal about these Myposans, but nothing that was later to stand me in better stead than

the description of these under-water corridors. He did not like the Myposans, upon whom he looked with the utmost contempt. He said that they were neither fish nor human, and their arrogant egotism irked him no end.

"They consider themselves supermen whose destiny it is to rule the world, forcing what they call their culture on all other peoples. Culture!" he snorted, and then words failed him.

"We have had peoples like that in my own world," I said, "led by such men as Genghis Khan and Attila the Hun who wrecked the culture and civilization of their times and set the world back many centuries; and I suppose we shall have others."

"And what happened after them?" asked Kandar.

"Civilization struggled slowly from the mire into which they had plunged it, as I suppose it always will struggle back after each such catastrophe; but to what glorious heights it might have attained had they never lived!"

CHAPTER XII

THE next day dawned like any other day. The intense light of the Sun, filtering through the two cloud envelopes, imparted a brilliance comparable to that of an April day in our own northern hemisphere when the sky is lightly overcast by fleecy clouds; yet, for me, it was to be no ordinary day. It was to mark a definite, a drastic change in my fortunes.

With other slaves, I was still guarding the horrid little creatures in the pool. I day-dreamed of Duare. I lived again the high moments of our lives together. I planned. I schemed fantastic schemes for our escape; but, when all was said, I was still a slave.

The major domo came into the patio with four warriors. They were garbed

differently from those I had seen on the grounds of Yron's palace or elsewhere. Their trappings were more ornate.

Kandar was patrolling at my side. "Members of the jong's guard," he said. "I wonder what they are doing here."

We were soon to learn. Led by the major domo, they approached us. The major domo confronted me. His gills flapped idly; and he blew a little, as befits one who addresses a low slave.

"Slave," he said, "you will accompany these warriors."

"Why?" I asked.

Then his gills *did* flap, and he blew angrily. "Because I say so," he belated.

"That is not enough," I said. "I don't like it here, but I don't intend going some place that may be worse."

"Enough of this," snapped one of the jong's warriors. "Come, slave! and come alive, or we will take you dead." He came toward me.

I drew my pistol, and the major domo seized the arm of the warrior. "Careful!" he cautioned. "With that thing he can kill you—and he will."

"He threatens one of the jong's guard?" demanded the warrior.

"I do," I said. "I threaten them all and I can kill them all. Ask any of Yron's people if I speak the truth."

"Why hasn't that thing been taken from him?" demanded the warrior.

"Because whoever touches it dies," said the major domo.

"Tell me where I am going and why," I insisted, "and then perhaps there will be no reason for killing."

The major domo and the warriors stepped to one side and whispered together; then the former said to me, "There is no reason why you should not know. The noble Yron, as a mark of his loyalty and high esteem, has presented you to our beloved jong."

So! The noble Yron was getting rid of a dangerous and undesirable alien by passing him on to his ruler. The loyal Yron! I had to smile. Had the German Kaiser presented Trotsky, armed with a bomb, to the Czar of Russia the acts would have been somewhat analogous.

"Why are you smiling?" demanded the warrior spokesman.

"I am happy," I said. "I shall be delighted to go to the palace of Tyros, and I will go willingly on one condition."

"Slaves do not make conditions," growled the warrior.

"I am an exception," I said; "you have never before seen a slave like me." I twirled my pistol about my finger.

"Well, what do you want now?" demanded the major domo.

"I think that Yron should also present Kandar to his jong. Kandar is a much more valuable slave than I, and if Yron really wishes to demonstrate his loyalty and high esteem he should present a really royal gift to his jong—two princes instead of one; the Crown Prince of Japal and the Crown Prince of Korva." Of course I didn't say Crown Prince; I said Tanjong.

I made this condition not only because I had grown very fond of Kandar but because I felt that he could be very helpful to me in effecting the rescue of Duare and the eventual escape of all three of us.

"That," said the warrior, "is an excellent suggestion."

"But Yron only mentioned the slave Carson," objected the major domo.

"Should I return to Tyros with only one slave and have to report that Yron refused to give two, the jong might be very angry with Yron," suggested the warrior.

The major domo was on a spot. So was Yron. "I shall have to consult my

master," said the former.

"We will wait," said the warrior, and the major domo disappeared within the palace.

"I hope you don't mind going with me," I said to Kandar. "I felt that we might work together, but I had no opportunity to discuss the matter with you."

"I was delighted when you mentioned it," he replied. "I only wish that Artol might accompany us."

"I wish so, too; but perhaps I have gone as far as is safe. Tyros might become suspicious if he learned that he had acquired three slaves who were bound together by ties of friendship and that one of them had proved highly subordinate. I have a feeling that Yron has pulled a boner."

THE shark-like major domo came weaving back into the patio. His gills were moving gently, and he sucked air in between his teeth as he addressed the warrior. "The noble Yron is delighted by the opportunity to present two slaves to the mighty Tyros. He would be delighted to give three slaves."

"That is noble of him," I said, "and if this warrior of the jong's guard would like to select an unusually fine slave I suggest that he have a look at this one, with whom I have been particularly impressed since I have been in the palace of Yron;" and I indicated Artol.

The major domo glared at me with his fishy eyes, his gills flapped, and he blew noisily. Artol was one of Yron's best and most valuable slaves. The warrior looked him over, felt his muscles, examined his teeth.

"An excellent specimen," he said. "I am sure that our jong will be well pleased with this gift."

Artol was pleased, too, for now he would not have to be separated from his

beloved Tanjong. I was pleased; Kandar was pleased; the jong's warriors were pleased. The major domo was not amused, but I was sure that Yron was glad to get rid of me at any price. Now he could come out into his patio without fearing for his life. Perhaps I could make Tyros so anxious to be rid of me that he would give us all our freedom.

The leader of the warriors stood looking at me. He seemed to hesitate. I guessed that he was wondering what other demands I might make if he again attempted to take me away, and hesitated to subject his authority to any further embarrassing contretemps.

Kandar, Artol, and I were standing together. The other slaves and warriors and the major domo were watching the ranking warrior. The situation was becoming strained and difficult, and I was on the point of relieving it by suggesting that we leave for the palace of Tyros, when a whirl of wings and a shrill whistle attracted our attention upward.

"Guypal!" some one cried; and, sure enough, a huge gupyal was diving straight for the pool.

The warriors with their metal tridents and the slaves with theirs of wood rushed about frantically, screaming, and raising such a din as should have frightened away a battalion of gupyals; but it never deterred this one. It was diving straight for the center of the pool well out of reach of the tridents. A dozen were cast at it, and all missed.

What has taken so long to tell happened in a few seconds; and in those few seconds I whipped out my pistol; and as the gupyal touched the surface of the pool, I sent a stream of r-rays through its body. It cut the water, staining it red with its blood; and then it floated to the surface, dead.

The warriors looked at me in open mouthed astonishment. The major domo nodded his head. "You see," he

said to the warriors, "that what I told you is true. This is a very dangerous man."

"And so Yron is giving him to Tyros!" exclaimed the leader of the warriors.

"You do not understand," hedged the major domo. "This is Yron's most valuable slave. All alone he can guard the children against guypals. Twice now has he proved this. Yron thought that Tyros would be glad to have such a guard for the royal children."

The warrior grunted. "Perhaps," he said.

"And now," I said to the warrior, "why don't you take us to Tyros? Why are we hanging around here listening to this little man?"

The major domo was speechless from blowing.

"Very well," said the warrior. "Come, slaves!" and thus at last we started for the palace of Tyros; Kandar, Artol, and I.

CHAPTER XIII

I THOUGHT that now I should see Duare often, but I was doomed to disappointment. The palace of Tyros sprawls over many acres; and the compound where the common slaves are confined is far from the precincts allotted to royalty, where Duare served, as I learned soon after arriving.

The slaves' quarters were open sheds forming a quadrangle in the center of which was a pool. There was no growing thing within the quadrangle, just bare earth, pounded hard by the passage of bare and sandaled feet. We slept upon mats. The pool was for bathing. Its connection with the lake was by a conduit too small to permit of escape. Fresh water was being constantly supplied it from a stream which ran down from the distant hills; so it

was always clean and fresh. The entire compound was kept in immaculate condition, and the food rations of the royal slaves were far better and more generous than those I had before seen. Insofar as these matters were concerned, we had little of which to complain. It was the arrogance and brutality of the guards that made the lives of many of the slaves miserable.

My reputation and I arrived simultaneously. I could tell it by the way the guards eyed me and my pistol; and it soon spread to the slaves, with the result that I was immediately the center of attention. Kandar and Artol had to tell over and over the story of my encounters with Yron and his major domo, and so great became the laughter that the guards came among us with their whips and laid onto many a back. I called Kandar and Artol to my side; and when the guards came slashing in our vicinity I laid my hand upon the butt of my pistol, and the guards passed us by.

Among the slaves was a Myposan named Plin who was very friendly. Now, I do not like Myposans; but a friendly Myposan might some time be a handy thing to have around; so, while I did not particularly cultivate Plin, neither did I discourage his friendly advances.

He was much interested in my pistol, and asked many questions about it. He said that he was surprised that I had not been murdered while I slept; as a slave with such a weapon as mine was a very dangerous person for any master to have around. I told him that Kandar, Artol, and I took turns standing watch every night to prevent just that very thing.

"And it will really kill anybody who touches it?" he asked.

"Certainly," I said.

He shook his head. "Maybe the

other things you have told me are true, but I do not believe that anyone would be killed just by touching it. If that were true, you would be killed."

"Would you like to touch it and prove your theory?" I asked.

"Certainly," he said. "I am not afraid of it. Let me have it."

I shook my head. "No," I said. "I would not let a friend kill himself."

He grinned. "You are a very smart man," he said.

Well, I thought he was rather smart, too. He was the only Myposan who had had the brains to pierce my ruse. I was glad that he was my friend, and I hoped that he would keep his suspicions to himself.

IN order to change the subject, which was growing distasteful to me, I asked him why he was in slavery.

"I was warrior to a noble," he explained, "and one day this noble caught me making love to one of his concubines; so he sold me into slavery, and I was purchased by Tyros' agent."

"And you will have to remain a slave the rest of your life?" I asked.

"Not if I am fortunate enough to win the favor of Tyros," he said. "Then I should be freed and probably be permitted to enter the service of Tyros as a warrior."

"And you think that this may happen?" I asked.

"Something tells me that it may happen very soon," he replied.

"You have been a slave in the palace of Tyros for some time?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Then perhaps you can give me some information that I should very much like to have."

"I shall be glad to, if I can," he assured me. "What is it?"

"My mate, Duare, was purchased by Tyros' agent. Have you seen her? Do

you know where she is and how she fares?"

"I have seen her," said Plin. "She is very beautiful, and she fares quite well. She is serving the Vadjong Skabra, Tyros' queen. That is because she is so beautiful."

"I don't understand," I said.

"Well, you see Tyros has many concubines, some of which have been slaves; but none of them is very beautiful. Skabra sees to that. She is very jealous, and Tyros is much afraid of her. She has let him have a number of ill favored concubines; but when a beautiful woman like your mate comes along, Skabra takes her for herself."

"So my mate is safe?"

"As long as she serves Skabra, she is safe," he said.

Life in the slave compound of the jong of Mypos was monotonous. The guards took us out in shifts for odd jobs around the palace grounds. As a rule they were too bored themselves to even wield their whips on those who were too helpless or too poor to protect themselves. They left Kandar, Artol, and me alone because of my pistol; and Plin, who was able to receive money from outside, won immunity and favors by bribery. He hung around me a great deal, and was always fawning on me and flattering me. I got rather tired of him.

I chafed under the enforced inaction which offered not the slightest suggestion of a hope for escape. I wished that they would give me more work to occupy my time. "Wait until you're sent to the ships," said one of my fellow slaves; "you'll get work enough there."

The days dragged on. I longed for Duare and for freedom. I commenced to concoct fantastic and wholly impractical schemes for escape. It became an obsession with me. I didn't discuss them with Kandar or others; because, fortunately, I realized how silly they

were. It was well that I didn't.

Then, one day, Tyros sent for me. Tyros, the great jong, had sent for a slave! The compound buzzed with excitement. I had an idea why I was being thus signally honored. The gossip of the slave compound and the guardroom had reached the ears of Tyros, and his curiosity had been aroused to see the strange slave with yellow hair who had defied nobles and warriors.

It was curiosity that killed the cat, but I feared it might work with reverse English in this instance. However, the summons offered a break in the monotony of my existence and an opportunity to see Tyros the Bloody. It would also take me into the palace proper for the first time, and I had been anxious to gain some knowledge of it against the day that I might attempt to take Duare away.

So I was escorted by a strong detachment of warriors to the palace of the jong of Mypos.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Myposans have little or no sense of the artistic. They seem to be form and line blind. Their streets are crooked; their houses are crooked. The only harmony that abounds is that of disharmony. The palace of Tyros was no exception. The throne room was a shapeless, polyangular area somewhere near the center of the palace. In some places the ceiling was twenty feet high, in others not much more than four. It was supported by columns of different sizes, irregularly spaced. It might have been designed by a drunken surrealist afflicted with a hebephrenic type of dementia praecox, which, of course, is not normal, because surrealists are not always drunk.

The dais upon which Tyros sat on a wooden bench might have been rolled

out of a giant dice box and left where it came to rest. Nobody could possibly have placed it where it was, for the major portion of the room was behind it; and Tyros' back was toward the main entrance.

I was led around in front of the dais, where I had my first sight of Tyros. It was not a pleasant sight. Tyros was very fat—the only Myposan I had seen whose physique was not beautiful. He had pop eyes and a huge mouth, and his eyes were so far apart that you could see them bend inward to focus. His great gills were terribly inflamed, appearing diseased. On the whole, he was not a pretty sight.

The room was full of nobles and warriors, and among the first that I saw was Yron. His gills were palpitating and he was blowing softly. I knew by these signs that he was distraught. When his eyes alighted on me, his gills flapped angrily.

"How is the noble Yron this morning?" I inquired.

"Silence, slave!" ordered one of my guard.

"But Yron is an old friend of mine," I objected. "I am sure that he is glad to see me."

Yron just stood there and flapped and blew. I saw some of the nobles near him sucking air through their teeth; and I guessed that they were laughing at his discomfiture, for that is as near as they can come to laughing.

I saw Vomer there, too. I had almost forgotten him. He stared at me with his dull fishy eyes. He hated me, too. In all that room full of people, I had no friend.

When I was halted below the dais, Tyros focused his eyes upon me. "Yellow hair!" he commented. "A strange looking creature. Yron says that he is a very valuable slave. What makes him so valuable—his yellow

hair? I have heard many things about you, slave. I have heard that you are insubordinate and disrespectful and that you carry a weapon that kills people if you merely point it at them. What foolishness is that? They've been lying to me, haven't they?"

"Yron probably has," I said. "Did he tell you that I was a valuable slave?"

"Silence!" cried a noble at my side. "Slaves do not question the great jong."

Tyros waved the man to silence. "Let him speak. I asked him a question. His answer interests me. Yes, slave, Yron said that you were very valuable."

"Did he tell you what he paid for me?" I asked.

"It was some very large amount. I do not recall that he stated it exactly, but I know that he gave me the impression that you had cost him quite a fortune."

"He paid just ten kloovol for me," I said. "I didn't cost him much and he was afraid of me; those are the reasons that he presented me to you."

"Why was he afraid of you?" demanded Tyros.

"Because he knew that I could kill him any time I wished; so he gave me to you. Perhaps Yron wanted you killed."

All gills were flapping by this time, and there was a great blowing. Every eye was upon Yron. "He lies," he screamed. "I gave him to you, Tyros, to guard your children. Twice he saved mine from guypals."

"But he cost you only ten kloovol?" demanded Tyros.

"I got a very good bargain. I—"

"But he cost only ten kloovol and you were afraid of him; so you gave him to me." Tyros was screaming by this time. Suddenly he focused his popeyes on me, as though struck by a new idea. "How do I know that that thing can kill

anybody?" he demanded.

"The noble Yron has told you so," I reminded him.

"The noble Yron is a liar and the son of a liar," snapped Tyros. "Fetch a slave!" he shouted at a warrior standing near him.

WHILE he was waiting for the slave to be brought, he returned his attentions to the unhappy Yron. He vilified and insulted him and his ancestors back for some ten generations; then he started in on Yron's wife, her ancestors, and her progeny; nor did he desist until the slave was brought.

"Stand him up with his back to that pillar," ordered Tyros; then he turned to me. "Now kill him with that thing, if you can," he said.

"Why should I kill a fellow slave when there are so many of my enemies about me?" I demanded.

"Do as I tell you, slave!" ordered Tyros.

"I kill only in self-defense," I said. "I will not kill this man."

"You can't kill him; that is the reason," fumed Tyros. "That thing wouldn't kill anybody. You are a great liar; and you have frightened others with your lies, but you can't frighten Tyros."

"But I can easily prove that it will kill," I said, "without killing this defenseless man."

"How?" demanded the jong.

"By killing you," I told him.

Figuratively, Tyros went straight through the ceiling. His gills flapped wildly, and he blew so hard that he couldn't speak for a full minute.

"Seize him!" he cried to the members of his bodyguard. "Seize him and take that thing from him."

"Wait!" I ordered, pointing the pistol at him. "If anyone comes nearer me or threatens me, I'll kill you, Tyros."

I can kill every one in this room if I wish. I do not wish to kill any one unless I am forced to. All I ask is that you set free my mate, Duare, myself, and my two friends, Kandar and Artol. If you do that, we will go away; and you will be safe. As long as I am in Mypos no one is safe. What do you say, Tyros?"

His warriors hesitated, turning toward him. Tyros was on a spot. If he showed fear of me, he would lose face. If he insisted on his bodyguard carrying out his orders, he might lose his life. He decided to hedge. He turned on Yron.

"Traitor!" he screamed. "Assassin! You sent this man here to kill me. Because he has refused to do your bidding, I forgive him what he has said to me. After all he is only an ignorant creature of a lower order. He knows no better. But you, knave! You shall die! For high treason I condemn you to death, and this man shall be your executioner.

"Send that other slave back to his quarters and place Yron against the pillar in his place," he ordered; then he turned again to me. "Now let's see what that thing will do. Kill Yron!"

"I told you once that I kill only in self-defense. If you want some one killed, come and attack me yourself, or shut up."

Like most tyrannical despots, Tyros was half mad. He had little or no control of his temper, and now he was frantic. He fumed and bellowed and flapped and blew and tore at his beard; but I saw that he feared me, for he made no move to attack me himself, nor did he order others to do so.

"Listen," I said. I had to shout to be heard above the racket he was making. "Free us, as I suggested, and let us go away in peace. If you don't I may be forced to kill you in order to effect our

escape."

"You would be well rid of him at any price," said one of his nobles.

This was all Tyros required to give him a slender out. "If that is the wish of my people," he said, "I will consider it. In the meantime return this slave to the slaves' quarters, and let me see no more of him."

CHAPTER XV

WHEN I returned to the compound,

I found that the slave whom I had refused to kill had spread the story of my encounter with Tyros; and, as is usually the case with such a story, it had lost nothing in the telling. The other slaves looked at me as they might at one who had returned from the grave; or, what might probably be a better simile, as one on his way to the death chamber. They crowded around me, asking many questions; some of them just content to touch one who had bearded the lion in his den. Plin was loudest in his praise. Kandar seemed worried. He thought that I had finally sealed my doom. Artol was genuinely proud of me. He had the warrior's reaction—that what I had done was worth dying for. Somehow Plin's praise seemed tinged by envy. After all, Plin was a Myposan.

Kandar, Artol, and I finally detached ourselves from the others and sat down on the hard packed ground to talk. They were both very grateful that I had included them in my demand for freedom, but neither of them thought that there was the slightest chance that Tyros would free us.

"He'll find some way to destroy you," said Kandar. "After all, one man can't overcome a city full of enemies."

"I don't expect to overcome a city full of enemies," I replied. "However, one might escape from a city full of

enemies."

"But how?" asked Artol. "Have you a plan?"

"S-s-s-t!" cautioned Kandar. "Here comes Plin."

So Kandar mistrusted the Myposan. I was not surprised. The fellow was too oily, and his protestations of friendship were overdone.

Kandar, Artol, and I had maintained something of a night watch, one of us always trying to remain awake; but we must have slipped up that night, for the next morning my pistol was gone. It had been stolen while we slept. I discovered my loss almost immediately I awoke; and when I told the others, Kandar said, "Where is Plin?"

Plin was not in the slaves' compound. We wondered how he had dared touch the weapon. Either the proffered reward or the threat of punishment had been too great for him to resist. You see, we did not doubt that it was Plin.

I expected to be put to death immediately, but a circumstance intervened to save me temporarily. It was a royal celebration. One of Tyros' young had developed arms, and legs, and lungs, and was ready to emerge from the pool—the future jong of Mypos. Many slaves were required in connection with this celebration, and we were all herded into the great royal patio, covering several acres, in the center of which was the jong's pool, where the royal monstrosities developed.

The patio was filled with nobles, warriors, women, and slaves. I saw Plin and approached him, but he went quickly away into that part of the garden reserved for free men. So that had been Plin's reward! Of course I could not follow him there. Warriors saw to that.

A palace slave saw the little drama as Plin eluded me and the warriors roughly turned me back. The fellow

smiled at me. "You must be the slave from whom Plin stole the strange weapon," he hazarded.

"I am," I said. "I wish I knew where it was."

"It is in the pool," he said. "Tyros was so afraid of it that, in his terror, he ordered Plin to throw it into the pool."

Well, at least I knew where my pistol was, but little good it would do me. It might lie there forever, for it would never corrode. The metal of which it was fabricated insured that. And, doubtless, no Myposan would dare retrieve it.

There was a great deal of drinking going on, mostly a potent brew that the Myposans concoct. Tyros was drinking a great deal, and getting rather drunk. I saw Skabra, his vadjong—a most brutal looking female. I did not wonder that Tyros was afraid of her. And I saw Duare, too; but I could not catch her eye. I could not get close enough to her; and there were hundreds of people there, constantly milling.

In the afternoon, a great cry arose; and every eye was turned upon the pool, from which a hideous little amphibian emerged. It still had the head of a fish. Nobles ran forward to catch it; but it eluded them, scampering here and there to avoid capture. Finally, however, it was brought to bay; and a net was thrown over it; then it was borne away to the royal nursery, where it would have a private pool and could complete its development.

By this time Tyros was quite drunk. I saw him approach Duare, and I saw Skabra rise from her bench and move toward them. I couldn't hear what Tyros said to Duare, but I saw her little chin go up as she turned her back on him. Skabra's voice was raised in anger—shrill, harsh—and Tyros, ordinarily afraid of her, screamed back at

her, brave with liquor. They were calling each other all the unroyal names they could lay their tongues to. Every eye was upon them.

Suddenly Tyros seized Duare and started to drag her away; then it was that I started for him. No one paid any attention to me. All were too interested in the actions of the principals in this royal triangle, for now Skabra had started in pursuit.

Tyros was running toward the pool, carrying Duare with him. He reached the edge; and, to my horror, dove in, dragging Duare beneath the surface with him.

CHAPTER XVI

A WARRIOR tried to bar my way as I ran toward the pool. I swung a right to his chin, and he went down. A trident whizzed past my head as I dove, and another cut the water beside me after I had submerged. But no one followed me. Perhaps they felt that Tyros was safe in his own element and needed no protection. Perhaps they didn't care what happened to Tyros, for they all feared and hated him.

The pool was deep, very deep. Ahead of me and below I could see the figures of Tyros and Duare going deeper and deeper. Could I reach them before Duare drowned? Could either of us survive a struggle with the amphibian king and reach the surface alive? These questions harassed me, but I swam on.

As I reached the bottom, I saw Tyros slither into a dark hole at the very bottom of the pool's side wall; and as I followed him, my lungs seemingly on the verge of bursting, I saw something lying on the floor of the pool. It was my pistol, lying where Plin had thrown it. I had only to reach out my hand and pick it up; then I was in a dark corridor fighting for my life.

I thought that corridor would never end, nor did it add any to my peace of mind to realize that it might end in a watery cavern from which there would be no escape for me or for Duare. My only hope and encouragement lay in what Kandar had told me of these pools and passageways. I prayed that this passageway led to another, nearby pool. It did. Presently I saw light ahead and then above. Almost unconscious from suffocation, I shot to the surface—just in time. Another second, I honestly believe, and I should have been dead.

I saw Tyros dragging Duare from the pool. Her body was limp. It was evident that she was dead. Had I been absolutely certain of that, I could have shot Tyros then; but I hesitated, and in the brief instant of my indecision he bore her through a doorway and was gone.

I was absolutely exhausted. I tried to climb from the pool only to discover that I did not have the strength. What I had gone through had sapped it all. I looked about me as I clung to the edge of the pool. I was in a small apartment or court, which the pool almost entirely filled. It had no roof. Several doors led from it. There was one small window.

My strength came back rapidly, and I dragged myself from the pool and followed through the doorway which had swallowed Tyros and Duare. Here I encountered a veritable labyrinth of corridors. Which way had Tyros gone? There was no clew. Every precious moment counted if, Duare alive, I was to rescue her; or, Duare dead, I was to avenge her. It was maddening.

Presently I heard a voice, and I followed it. Soon I recognized it. It was Tyros' drunken voice exhorting, commanding. At last I found him. He was bending over the lifeless form of Duare demanding that she arise and follow

him. He was telling her that he was tired of carrying her. He didn't seem to realize that she was dead.

When he saw me and my leveled pistol, he screamed; then he swept Duare's body up and held it before him as a shield; as he hurled his trident. It was a poor cast, and missed. I advanced slowly toward him, taking my time, gloating over my vengeance.

All the time, Tyros was screaming for help. I didn't care how much help came—I could always kill Tyros before they could kill me. I expected to die in that chamber; and I was content; because I would not live without Duare.

Tyros tried to draw his sword as he saw me coming nearer, but Duare's body interfered. At last he let it slip to the floor; and, still screaming, he came toward me. It was then that a door flew open and a dozen warriors burst into the room.

I LET Tyros the Bloody have it first. He collapsed in a heap; then I turned the weapon upon the advancing warriors. They nearly got me as a veritable shower of tridents drove through the air at my almost naked body. It was the very number of them that saved me. They struck one another and their aim was diverted—just enough to permit me to dodge and elude them. After that it was simple. The warriors with their swords were no match for me. I mowed down ten of them before the remaining two turned and fled.

At last I was alone with the body of my mate. I turned toward it. Duare was sitting up, looking at me wonderingly.

"How did you do it, Carson?" she demanded. "However in the world did you do it?"

"I could do much more than this for you," I said, as I took her in my arms.

"What now?" asked Duare presently. "We are trapped. But at least we shall die together."

"We are not dead yet," I said. "Come with me!"

I led the way to the pool from which we had just emerged. Through the one small window I could see the great lake scarcely a hundred yards away. I was certain that a corridor led from this pool to the lake. "Can you swim another hundred yards under water?" I asked her.

"I can try," she said.

"Wait until I make sure that there is a corridor leading to the lake"; then I dove into the pool. I found an opening near the bottom of the end of the pool nearest the lake; so I was reasonably certain that it led into a corridor that would take us out of the city of Mypos. The only drawback to the plan was that we should be swimming in the lake right off the quays of Mypos in broad daylight. It didn't seem possible that we could escape detection.

As I broke the surface of the pool after locating the corridor, Duare whispered to me that she heard someone approaching. I listened. Yes, I could hear them plainly—the sound of sandaled feet and the rattling of accouterments; then we heard men shouting, and the sounds were very near.

"Come, Duare!" I called and she dove in.

I led her to the mouth of the tunnel and followed her in. I must have been wrong in my estimate of the distance to the lake. It was far more than a hundred yards. I marvelled at Duare's endurance, for I was almost all in and virtually at my last gasp, had I dared to gasp, when I saw light shining from above. As one, we shot up to the surface; and as our heads broke it, almost simultaneously, Duare flashed me a reassuring smile. Ah, what a girl! In

two worlds; yes, even in all the Universe I doubt that there is her like.

We found ourselves in a small, circular pool in the bottom of a roofless, windowless tower. A ledge, a few feet wide, encircled the pool. We dragged ourselves on to it to rest and plan. We decided to remain where we were until after dark; then try to reach the lake. If we were followed into this pool, I could account for our pursuers as fast as they stuck their heads above the surface. How I thanked Heaven for that pistol!

Well, after dark we swam through the remainder of the passageway to the lake; and followed the shore line to a point beyond the city. What hideous terrors of the deep we were fortunate enough to escape, I can only guess; but we came through all right. More by

intuition than anything else, I made our way back to the point at which we had left the anotar. Our hearts were in our mouths as we searched for it. The night was dark. Even the strange Venusian luminance seemed lesser than usual. At last we gave up, disheartened, and lay down on the soft grass to rest.

We both must have fallen asleep almost instantly, for the next I remember it was daylight. I sat up and looked around. Duare lay asleep beside me; and a hundred yards away, just inside the forest, was the anotar!

I shall never forget with what a sense of gratitude to God and with what relief we felt the ship rise above the mences of this inhospitable land.

The only blemish on our happiness was that Kandar and Artol were still prisoners in Mypos.

« HARNESSEING THE SAHARA »

By JACK WEST

EVER since man has inhabited the earth the great Sahara desert has been a more or less useless parcel of land. Yet about eighteen hundred times more energy inundates this terrifying desert than is contained in all the coal mined in the course of a year. And in one single day this vast wasteland receives three times as much energy as is contained in all the coal we burn in a whole year.

"Where does all this energy come from?" you ask.

The sun is the answer. It supplies enough energy to desert wastelands to run all of industry throughout the world and still have some power left over. But this energy is of little practical value until man devises some way to harness this wild power. Can this be done? We think so. . . .

Let's go back a few years to a fellow named John Ericsson, the ingenious builder of the Mohitor. He was the first man to invent a machine to catch the free energy coming from the sun. He built a huge concave mirror which reflected and concentrated the sun's rays on a blackened boiler at the focus and which was mechanically turned so that it followed the sun.

Ericsson had to use glass mirrors and his apparatus was expensive to construct. However, today with modern aluminum reflectors we could build miles and miles of reflective surface across the Sahara. These reflectors could shine their intense

heat on blackened pipes or tubes which would converge, in fanlike formation, at a central generating plant located near a source of water. This central generating plant could be thousands of miles from the outermost reflector.

From practically nothing each plant would be able to supply enough energy to accommodate two or three cities the size of New York or Chicago. Such power at ridiculously low rates would soon attract manufacturers. Capitalists would compete for the possession of desert sites and arid tropical land might command prices approaching those of Broadway real estate dealers. Smoking cities would spring up near the newly found sources of energy; a new social order would come to pass.

Supposing that it would be impractical to move our huge cities or build new ones, would we have to scrap our plan? Not at all. Chances are we could develop an energy storage cell. Nature might give us the answer to our problem here. Every green leaf is a virtual storehouse of solar power. Through an ingenious photochemical process plants use energy to synthesize a large number of chemical substances in their protoplasm. Every leaf is chuck full of stored up chemical energy and would it not be possible to build a container, using the leaf's process, to store power?

The cry, "We are overcrowded and restricted. We need fertile colonies!" would be a slogan of the past.

ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS..... Cesium

CESIUM IS FOUND
IN BY FAR THE GREATEST ABUNDANCE IN POLLUICITE ORE, FIRST DISCOVERED IN THE GRANITE PIGMAINTS ON THE ISLE OF ELBA FROM WHICH NAPOLEON ESCAPED BEFORE MEETING DEFEAT AT WATERLOO. . .

IN 1860...

THE THRILL OF A LIFETIME
WAS EXPERIENCED BY BUNSEN AND KIRCHHOFF OF GERMANY, WHEN, LOOKING THROUGH THEIR NEWLY INVENTED SPECTROSCOPE AT THE ALKALINE CARBONATE LEFT AFTER EVAPORATING 40 TONS OF MINERAL WATER, THEY DETECTED A NEW ELEMENT, ABSOLUTELY UNKNOWN TO THAT TIME! TWO THIN BLUE LINES DENOTED THE PRESENCE OF CESIUM.

14 YEARS EARLIER
PLATTNER, ANALYZING SOME POLLUICITE ORE, WAS UNABLE TO MAKE THE CONSTITUENTS ADD UP TO 100%. IN 1864 F. PISANI FOUND THAT PLATTNER HAD ERRONEOUSLY THOUGHT HIS CESIUM SULPHATE WAS A MIXTURE OF SODIUM AND POTASSIUM SULPHATES.

A RARE MUSEUM CURIOSITY AS LATE AS THE EARLY 1900'S, CESIUM FILLS AN ULTRA-MODERN ROLE IN THE PHOTO ELECTRIC CELL AND AS A 'GETTER' IN RADIO TUBES; CESIUM CHLORIDE MIXED WITH MAGNESIUM OR CALCIUM IN PILLS IS INTRODUCED INTO TUBES, THEN 'FLASHED' TO BURN UP OXYGEN. AN OUNCE OF IMPURITY IN 3 TONS OF CESIUM METAL IS ENOUGH TO RUIN IT FOR ELECTRIC EYE USE.

USE FOR CESIUM IS
IN THE TREATMENT FOR INCIPIENT TUBERCULOSIS.

CESIUM is number 55 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Cs , and its atomic weight is 132.81. Its melting point is 26.5° and its boiling point is 670.0° . Its density (solid) is 1.870. Cesium is one of the alkali metals, most important of which are sodium and potassium. It is a light metal which will float on water and is very soft and malleable. It has a positive valence of one. It is one of the most basic and active of metals, and readily tarnishes when exposed to air. It interacts with cold water to form a base (alkali) and hydrogen. It forms a very stable hydroxide and carbonate when heated. It is prepared by the electrolysis of the fused hydroxide or chloride. Its uses are few, and its rarity is due to its extreme instability in metal form.

Next Issue—The Romance of Chlorine

DEATH WALKS IN WASHINGTON



by James Norman

OSCAR, Detective of Mars, was the strangest creature ever seen on Earth—but the lovable little fellow wasn't half as strange as the ghastly figure that stalked murderously out of nowhere to challenge Oscar to a deadly duel of wits



Damballa fired point-blank at Oscar and the bullet hit him squarely on the breast

ALTHOUGH I am the only Martian detective on Earth, that was no reason for the entire United States Senate to arise and gasp the moment I entered the Senate gallery as a visitor.

It pleased me nevertheless. Momentarily, I expected hundreds of voices to join in a rousing chorus, crying: "Hur-ray for Os-Kar! Oscar! He's one of us, even if he is a Martian."

I preened myself in a modest way. Since Hodar the Magician had unexpectedly caused me to appear on this

planet during one of his shows in Manhattan, the American people had taken me to their hearts. They loved my dapper four-foot-five, penguin-shaped body. They were amused by my conical ears, salmon pink skin, top hat and feathered evening suit. But most of all, they liked my nose. It's tulip shaped. It has a pert sort of flare at the end like an old-fashioned gramophone horn.

Suddenly I realized the attention of the Senate and gallery was not upon me,

The gasp of surprise that had first rippled through the gathering quickly turned into a wave of paralyzing horror. Senator Toms, who was speaking from his seat, stopped abruptly. His bewildered face turned toward the entrance at the right of the Speaker's table.

The door had swung open. Through it, came an incredible giant of a man.

The man marched across the Senate floor with the jerky, mechanical movements of a sleep walker. The Senators in his path shrank back in stunned shock.

The face and movements of the intruder were those of a corpse. His body, clad only in a torn shirt and faded duck trousers, revealed flesh that seemed drained of blood. His huge, bullet-shaped head moved jerkily while dead, colorless lips were pressed into expressionless slits. Most horrible of all were his eyes—green, glaring, unblinking eyes—fastened upon Senator Toms.

A woman screamed from the gallery. Another clutched at her throat and sank to her seat in a dead faint. Below, on the floor, Senators froze beside their desks in horror.

The giant intruder strode across the chamber. He stopped a few feet from Senator Toms, who was still standing beside his desk, eyes held by the fascinating green horror of the intruder's eyes. Jerkily, the stranger looked upward toward the gallery, waiting silently, as though for a command. Then he turned again toward Senator Toms and drew a pistol from his belt. He fired point blank, the gun blasting with mechanical regularity . . . one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . shots, emptying into the senator's defenseless body.

The stranger about-faced and marched back across the Senate floor like a grotesque automaton, disappear-

ing through the swinging doors.

INSTANTLY, panic broke loose in the Senate. Men and women screamed. Sections of the gallery came to their feet, stunned by the cold-blooded murder done before their very eyes. The confusion grew as men crowded around the fallen Senator while others rushed toward the door in pursuit of the assassin.

I, of course, suffered no panic or fear. I am a complete stranger to that emotion. But I was keenly perturbed. While the assassin was in the Senate Chamber something strange and startling had come to my attention. I had noticed a very beautiful girl a few seats to the right of me in the gallery. But I'll explain this later. It has to do with my tulip nose.

"Good Lord! Murder in the Senate!" Hodar the Magician gasped.

I turned to Hodar, who had accompanied me on this visit in Washington. Hodar was visibly shaken. I could see that he was both shocked and angry.

"Downstairs!" I cried. "We'll catch the assassin. Quick!"

We raced downstairs. In my six months on Earth I had accustomed myself to the difference in gravity between our two planets. My greater strength compensated for the additional weight I had to carry on Earth. Now, I moved as quickly as Hodar.

In the marble walled corridor on the floor below, a crowd milled around. Then we saw a police officer banging on an office door with the butt of his pistol while a group of pallid, nervous men stood about.

"Open that door!" the policeman shouted.

"It's Senator Evans' office," someone cried. "Find Senator Evans. He's got a key."

"The killer locked himself in!"

The policeman heaved his bulky shoulder against the panel. The solid oak groaned.

"One moment. I'll open that door," said Hodar, stepping from the crowd.

The officer glanced at me, probably wondering whether I was a mascot or something he was just imagining. Then he stared at Hodar.

"You got a key?"

"No. I don't need one," said Hodar.

The officer raised his eyebrows.

"What the hell is this?" he grumbled.

Hodar drew a small chamois pouch from his pocket and selected an oddly shaped tool from it. "You see," he said "I'm Hodar. I'm an expert in magic, locks and assorted things."

Before he had finished speaking, he touched the lock with the instrument, pressed the door with his finger tips and it swung open easily. Hodar bowed as he always did after a performance.

"Get back, everybody!" the policeman glared at the crowd.

A tall, gray haired man pushed forward. He nodded in recognition at Hodar and hustled toward the officer. "I'm Senator Evans," he said. "This is my office."

Suddenly there was a pistol shot from within the office. The crowd around the door backed away a few feet. Meanwhile, from within the office, came the strange odor of death. My alert nose sensed that where others could not. I pushed in past the door, while Hodar, the policeman and the senator quickly followed. Then we stopped in our tracks, gasping at the strange scene before us.

SLUMPED at a desk was the most horrible sight I had ever seen. It was the assassin. His glazed eyes had now lost their evil greenish glint and were turned upward, revealing a dead white surface like the belly of a fish.

A smoking revolver dangled in his loose hand.

"Killed himself," the officer said in an awed voice.

A large, gaping hole had caved in the man's chest. But strangely, there was no trickle of blood from the wound. There was something distinctly weird about the condition of the body.

The police officer bent over, putting his ear to the dead man's chest. Suddenly he jerked back. His face was pallid. His hands shuddered and he began raving hysterically.

"Shot himself?" he screamed. "He's been dead weeks! Dead men don't shoot themselves. . . . Lemme out of here. . . ."

Hodar grabbed the officer and tried to calm him. The policeman fought like a raving maniac. He broke loose and went charging through the doorway. "Lemme out . . . dead don't shoot," he screamed incoherently.

I reached over, touched the dead man's face. I withdrew my hand as if shocked.

"This man *has* been dead for weeks!" I gasped.

"What?" Hodar cried.

"Impossible! I just saw this man murder Senator Toms," said Senator Evans. "I saw him run in here. The same man. The same Latin features. He's just shot himself. The gun's still smoking. No one else could have done it. The door was locked. There are no other entrances and the windows are barred."

I shrugged my dapper little head. I sniffed around the dead man, letting my tulip nose account for facts.

"*He's been dead six weeks,*" I finally announced.

Having perfect cognizance and control of all duct and ductless glands, Martians like myself are super-sensitive to odors. This one was a very

strange odor. A strong one. My sensitivity is such that I could even state the exact hour the assassin had died—six weeks ago.

But there was one factor I could not understand. If this man had died six weeks ago, how could he have shot Senator Toms and himself? Why did no blood trickle from the wound in his body?

"Are there races of men on Earth that you haven't told me about? Men without blood?" I asked Hodar.

It was then that I noticed a crumpled note clutched in the dead man's hand. Hodar and Senator Evans listened breathlessly as I read the note.

If Senators Williams, Warner, Shock, Gannes and Evans appear in Room 122, Hotel Byron at 8 P.M. they may avoid the same fate that has befallen Senator Toms. You are warned not to inform the police of this meeting or Señor Damballa will not appear.

Senator Evans was shaking like a leaf. "Williams, Warner, Shock, Gannes and Toms," he muttered weakly. "We are the Six Senator Bloc. I knew it! I knew they'd try to get us."

"But why?" asked Hodar.

"The Puerto Rican Defense Bill," said the Senator. "We've been fighting for it while some powerful interest has been trying to block it."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

MY quick Martian brain, which seizes all problems, sets them in formulas and solves them as such, went to work. Quickly, I measured Senator Evans girth and height, then compared them with Hodar's handsome figure. There was some basic resemblance.

"I'm going to work on this case," I

told Hodar. "I shall use my own methods. But first, the Senators will have to attend this meeting. You, Senator Evans, will not appear. You will remain in your apartment—"

There was a commotion at the door. A police inspector entered and was followed by a slim girl whose hair was as blond and smooth as cascading water. She took two steps, glanced at the horrible corpse in the chair, then swayed dizzily.

Senator Evans ran to her side. "It's all right, April," he said soothingly. "You shouldn't have come in here. This is nothing for a girl." The Senator glanced at Hodar and me. "My niece, April Woods," he said.

The girl quickly pulled herself together. Her shocked eyes avoided looking at the dead man. Instead, she stared at me. She was very pretty according to Earth standards, though she did not have the flared nose I would normally demand of a Martian beauty.

However, I was strangely moved. This was the girl I had seen earlier in the Senate gallery. My tulip nose began twitching in an embarrassing way and I blushed at least two shades pinker. As I mentioned before, I am sensitive to odors. On Mars we never use sound for speech—we use odors. During my first few months on Earth I found men saying things which they didn't realize they were saying. Occasional insults, in fact. But now, April Woods was saying something else, something passionate.

"Love—dangerous love!" that is what April Woods was saying to me. Remember, odors are words, and April Woods' perfume was a perilous call wafted into my tulip nose. I had to grip a table edge to control myself. I knew that I had fallen in love at first smell, or as you Earthmen would call it, first sight.

CHAPTER II

Señor Damballa

YOU may think it strange for a Martian of my shape and characteristics to be in love with an Earthwoman! True, it was a new and alarming experience for me. I found myself doing things which I had once thought were distinctly traits of Earthmen.

Once or twice, Hodar caught me whistling amorous little tunes. Once I even composed a ballad in odors which somehow upset the chambermaid who was cleaning our apartment. Hodar's young wife, Dedrie, also complained that I was destroying all her flowers by pulling the petals out one by one, saying, "She loves me; she loves me not; she loves me." Such traits come naturally to a lover, even a Martian lover.

"Stop mooning," said Hodar. "You have a crime case on your hands."

"I have at that," I said. "And I will work on this case with a new enthusiasm because April Woods' uncle's life is at stake. Perhaps even April is in danger."

So I went to work. I was prepared to do anything in order to save April. I thought perhaps she would show some interest in me and not look upon me as a Martian oddity. I spent the late afternoon changing Hodar's appearance, fattening his face with plastics, coloring his hair to the proper shade of gray, preparing him for my evening plan.

As the hour approached eight, there were five Earthmen in room 112 at the Hotel Byron. Four of the men did not want to come, but dared not be absent. They were the four Senators, Williams, Warner, Shock and Gannes. The fifth man looked like Senator Evans, talked like him—but was not. He was Hodar.

I was also there in the darkened,

badly furnished hotel room. Hodar had carried me in, packed in a large suitcase. He had explained that he was leaving for his home state as soon as the meeting with Señor Damballa was finished.

Through the peep holes in the side of the case I could hear and see all that transpired in the room. I could gauge the tangible, growing tension that infused the four men as they waited.

A middle aged man with the semblance of a double chin and paunch paced the floor. His bald head glistened under the single dim light in the shade drawn room. From his nervous gestures and bumpy sort of walk, I placed him as Senator Gannes.

"It's sheer madness," he muttered in a low voice. "Senators being intimidated. Should have called the FBI the way I wanted."

He faced the others in the room, watching to see if they agreed. His nervous eyes flitted from one face to another, then to the clock.

A heavy-set, dark haired man, dressed in loosely tailored tweed shook his head. He glanced at the clock with what impressed me as fearless eyes. He was Senator Shock.

"I agree with Evans," he said in a calm drawl while nodding his head toward Hodar. "There is absolutely no explanation for Senator Toms' death this noon. It's incredible and fantastic. It's up to us to get at the bottom of this."

Senator Williams, a thin, timid man who had sunk practically out of sight in an overstuffed chair shook his head nervously. I could see he was doing his best to keep from bolting out of the room in panic.

"That killer was a maniac, that's what!" Gannes snapped.

"Keep quiet," interrupted Senator Warner. His sharp eyes glared excitedly from beneath bushy brown

brows.

"Who's telling me to shut up?" Gannes bit back belligerently.

"Quiet, gentlemen," Hodar insisted. "You weren't invited here to lose your heads. We've already lost one friend today. Let us look at this thing calmly."

"Calmly! Calmly! You saw that horrible corpse of a murderer. I tell you, we ought to call the—"

Gannes' words abruptly stopped, his mouth remained agape while his face became rigid with lines of terror as the door opened and a ghastly figure entered the room.

"My God!" gasped Williams.

INVOLUNTARILY the five men in the room shrank back, staring at the horrible giant facing them. It was like an incredible mad dream! It was the same man who had killed Senator Toms; the same who had turned a gun on himself; the same who had been taken to the District Coroner's office as a corpse. . . . And now the dead man walked once more.

His bulky body moved jerkily, shutting the door behind him. The flesh was the same deadly corpse color. Beneath the torn shirt there was a gaping bloodless wound. The huge man's expressionless green eyes glared at the Senators without the slightest sign of intelligence. An automatic, gripped in his hand, covered the room.

"I am pleased that you have come," said the big man in a strangely muffled voice that seemed to contradict his huge build. "Señor Damballa is pleased."

From my cramped hiding place I could see that Hodar was the first to recover. I could see that he was straining to make some sense out of the situation. As a magician, Hodar had delved into the black arts and a walking corpse stirred his professional instincts.

"You are Damballa?" he asked.

"Certainly," came the muffled reply.

Hodar calmly lit himself a cigarette. "What is this?" he asked. "A masquerade? Who the devil fixed you up to look like the man that shot Senator Toms?"

The big man stirred somewhat stiffly. His automatic swerved in Hodar's direction.

"I shot Senator Toms," came the muffled answer. "I am no masquerade. I am Señor Damballa. I am a living dead man. Mine is the power to bring men back from the grave, to have them serve me."

"A zombie!" Hodar gasped.

"Exactly."

"That's impossible! I won't believe it!" cried Senator Williams. His lips trembled and he slipped back into his chair.

"How'd you get back here?" Hodar cut in. "You shot yourself this afternoon?"

"A zombie cannot die," Señor Damballa chuckled.

"Well, what's the meaning of this attempt at terror? What do you want with us?" Senator Shock cried impatiently.

The big man shifted his gaze toward Shock. Although the expression on his rigid face remained mute and enigmatic, a sharpening light flashed within his greenish eyes.

"The meaning of this," he said, "is to warn you. Death in the Senate today was a warning. It is understood that you five Senators, and the one who died, are preparing to introduce a Puerto Rican Defense Bill in the Senate. You propose to have the government buy the Estaban valley for a military airfield and underground hangars. *That bill must not be introduced!*"

"I'm afraid you can't oppose the entire United States Senate," said Hodar.

"If one of us in the Six Senator Bloc doesn't introduce it, someone else will. What are you going to do about that?"

SEÑOR DAMBALLA paused a moment. "You saw how Senator Toms died?"

"Yes."

"He was about to introduce the bill—then death took him," said Señor Damballa after a dramatic pause. "Each time a senator introduces that bill one of my zombies will stop him first."

Senator Shock stepped forward angrily. "You can't intimidate the Senate like that!" he cried. "I for one won't allow it. I'll see you damned first!"

"So?" Señor Damballa stared at the Senator evenly, watching him with expressionless cold green eyes. Then, almost like a machine, he swerved his gun toward Shock and pulled the trigger.

Shock staggered back in the face of the explosion and slid into a chair, his legs spreading out grotesquely. A round splotch of blood oozed from between his eyes. His hands slipped limply to the floor beside the chair and his eyes stared vacantly outward.

Señor Damballa paused, letting the scene impress itself upon the others in the room. Then he moved backward so that his automatic covered the others. An instant later the shocked stillness that followed the muffled explosion of the huge man's silenced gun was broken by Senator Gannes' hysterical scream.

"He's going to kill us all! He's mad! He'll kill us!"

Within my place of hiding, I also thought the man was mad. But something else disturbed me. It was the compounded odor I identified with Señor Damballa. It was not that of a long dead corpse which I had encountered earlier in the day. It was a bewildering, inhuman odor.

Suddenly Damballa glared at Hodar

and turned his gun toward the Magician. "I must kill one more," he calmly announced. "This man here is not Senator Evans. He is an imposter!" His fingers squeezed stiffly upon the trigger.

From my hiding place, I put up a terrific racket, shouting and thumping the side of the suitcase. I knew if Señor Damballa might be distracted, he might turn his gun on the source of disturbance. I welcome bullets. All explosives of calibers less than anti-tank .23 mm just ricochet off my flesh due to the density and compactness of my Martian muscles and skin.

With lightning reflexes, Hodar leaped into action. He plunged toward the mad zombie, hands outstretched to snatch his gun away. His fingers clutched the gun muzzle, knocking it down as a bullet stabbed into the floor.

The Zombie's other fist arched and crashed upon Hodar's skull with a resounding impact. Hodar slipped dazed to the floor.

BEDLAM ran rampant in the room for the next few moments. The other senators, Williams, Warner and Gannes seemed to recover their senses. They leaped from their chairs and mixed in the fray, clutching and pounding in against Señor Damballa.

Damballa towered above them like a grotesque, undefeatable giant. He grabbed Warner, shook him like a rat and tossed him at Williams. The two men crashed to the floor. Gannes stumbled over his two colleagues and fell at the giant's feet. Jerkily, Señor Damballa grabbed his automatic which had fallen from his hand, tore loose from the grip one of the senators had fastened on his leg. Then he was gone, slamming the door behind him.

A period of incredulous silence, broken only by heavy breathing, followed as the Senators picked themselves

up. Then, one by one, they stared at Hodar who was thoughtfully mopping his bloody temple. Hodar returned the stare and smiled wryly.

"Who the devil are you, if you aren't Evans?" Senator Williams muttered.

Hodar smiled, came over and released me from the out-sized suitcase, then introduced me to the startled senators.

"I'm Hodar the Magician," he said. "This is Oscar the Martian detective who's working on this case. I took the place of Senator Evans to be in on this meeting with Señor Damballa."

"Oscar!" gasped Senator Gannes, his eyes bulging. "My God, why didn't you warn us?"

I smoothed my Martian clothing—black tails and white front like an evening suit, but made of feathers which I can take off at will. I glanced at the various senators sharply.

"Did any of you men recognize the fact that Hodar was not Senator Evans?" I asked in my best sleuthing manner.

Williams shook his head and glanced at the other senators for confirmation. "I thought he was Evans. He's the spitting image of Evans, and I've known Evans for years," he said.

"There's something very mysterious here," I snapped. "There's a leak. *If you men didn't recognize Hodar, how was it that Señor Damballa saw through the disguise?* There was only one person who knew Senator Evans was not coming to this meeting—that was Senator Evans!"

CHAPTER III

Developments Incorporated

AT three o'clock in the morning we crouched in the shadowy stillness of the Congressional Library portico, our eyes fastened upon the movements of a

watchman who was making his rounds of the grounds.

"I don't like this business," Hodar whispered. "I think we ought to forget it and go back and check up on Senator Evans."

"Shh! There he goes," I answered. I did not blame Hodar at all for balking at my latest venture. We were about to go in for a new sort of house-breaking. We were going to break into the Congressional Library in the dead of night.

I crept toward the main door while Hodar followed close at my heels. Hodar hesitated a moment but finally gave in. He fumbled with the lock a moment before the bronze door swung silently open. We entered and shut the door behind us.

"I don't like it at all," said Hodar. "It's not legal."

I fumbled with a small pocket lamp, flashing the beam over the arched interior of the library. "It's the only place we can get the information I want right now," I whispered. "Crime is like a scientific experiment, that is to say, crime deduction. To get at the bottom of this case I insist on knowing the entire background."

"But it's simple," said Hodar. "Someone wants to stop the government from buying the Estaban valley so that it won't be used as a military airport. Probably a foreign government."

I shrugged my dapper shoulders and started up the stairway to the third floor where I knew the files I wanted were kept. "That's just the catch," I explained patiently. "They don't want an airport in the Estaban valley—but they don't seem to mind if the government builds an airport anywhere else on the island."

On reaching the third floor, Hodar and I separated, each of us working through a different set of files concern-

ing Puerto Rico in a very methodical manner. As a result of my scientific way of absorbing knowledge, I finished my work much sooner than Hodar. During the remaining hours until morning I busied myself making an elaborate memo for the Chief Librarian, devising an entirely new and more scientific method of cataloguing material which I thought up on the spur of the moment.

A few minutes before the library opened to the public, Hodar and I slipped out unobserved and got into an early cruising taxi.

HODAR sighed tiredly. "Haven't found much," he said. "The Estaban valley seems to be good sugar cane land."

I handed Hodar an address. "Is that familiar?" I asked. "Puerto Rican Developments Inc., 48 Delaware Avenue, Washington, D. C. They also seem to have some interest in the Estaban Valley."

"That's an American firm!" said Hodar. "My Lord this thing is getting mixed up. Zombies, Development companies, air fields! This zombie business gets me down. Zombies, or walking corpses might be real, or they might not. Some very good authorities have witnessed the voodoo rites in Haiti and Puerto Rico which brought dead men back to life. Damballa, for example, is the name of a voodoo charm used in the rites."

Our taxi skidded around a corner, nearing Delaware Avenue.

"What does a zombie do when he comes to life?" I asked.

Hodar's cheeks reddened, as if to admit that although he didn't want to believe his words, he could not help himself. "Zombies, once they're brought to life," he said slowly, "have no minds, no wills of their own. They never eat, never sleep nor drink. They are slaves

obeying only the commands of the person who brought them back to life. An army of zombies would be almost invincible on a battle field for they feel no pain, need no supplies and can only be killed in one manner—a silver bullet through the heart."

I was silent for the moment for I watched the puzzled ridges that creased Hodar's brow.

"That's what gets me," said Hodar. "How did the zombie who killed Senator Toms in the Senate shoot himself? How did he come back to life a second time after he had been taken off to the Coroner's and who controlled him?"

I fished in my pocket for a small object and handed it to Hodar. "This is how he died," I said.

Hodar gasped. "A silver bullet!" "Yes," I added. "I picked it up in Senator Evans' office. It had penetrated the zombie's chest, heart and come out his back."

Hodar stared at the bullet unbelievably. "How did he come back a second time?" he cried. "It's impossible! Yet we saw him in the hotel room. But it's still impossible! Zombies don't come back to life a second time!"

"That's what I hoped you'd say," I answered. I allowed a smile to play upon my face; a smile as enigmatic and knowing as the smile of Mona Lisa.

Our taxi heeled to the curb at the entrance of one of Washington's few attempts at skyscrapers. Streams of office girls and business men on their way to work, stepped aside to let us enter. Some were a little nervous, wondering why Hodar didn't have me on a leash. Others tipped their hats in respect to my wide-spread talents as a detective.

A MOMENT later we were on the sixth floor, waiting in the ante-room of the Puerto Rican Developments Inc., office. Then the door of an inner of-

fice opened. A dark haired, narrow headed man, slight of build, greeted us.

"I am Señor Vasquez," he said, eying us suspiciously. "What can I do for you."

As usual in such situations, Hodar took the lead. "I want an interview," he said bluntly, presenting his card.

Señor Vasquez fingered a wisp of a moustache. "I have little time," he said. "What is it?"

"You've an interest in the Estaban Valley," said Hodar. "What is your opinion of the Puerto Rican Defense Bill? And do you think there's any connection between the deaths of Senators Toms and Shock and the bill?"

Señor Vasquez shook his head sadly. "The Senators," he said. "Ah, that is very sad, no?"

"And the Estaban Valley?"

"I can only give you the opinion of my company," said Señor Vasquez. "We are a company incorporated under American laws. Some of the owners are Puerto Rican like myself. Some are American. We are interested in American defense but we feel that there are better locations for a military airfield in Puerto Rico than the Estaban Valley. We feel that Estaban Valley is of more value for cultivation."

"Cultivation?" snapped Hodar.

"Yes. The Development Company, we make the sugar, you know."

A phone buzzed in the inner office. Señor Vasquez bowed suavely and went to answer it. "I guess that's all," I told Hodar. "Let's go."

"All?" Hodar exclaimed. "I'd like to crack him in the jaw just to knock some of the grease out of his joints!"

We hurried out of the office. As I rounded the doorway into the hallway I crashed into a heavy-set individual. Both of us went to the floor in a flurry of Martian arms and Earthian legs. The heavy man struggled to his feet,

carefully placed a monocle in his right eye and stared at me.

Aghast at the sight he saw; my penguin shaped body, tulip nose aquiver, conical ears and dapper top hat, he dropped his monocle again. "Verdamft!" he exclaimed. Then he whirled and disappeared into the office of the Puerto Rican Developments Inc.

There was a curious expression on Hodar's face. He seemed not to notice that I was lying on the floor.

"I've seen that man before," he said. "Very familiar face. Let me place it. Yes, it was in Berlin four years ago. He was an important agent of one of the foreign governments."

"Which is why we have a lot to learn from Señor Vasquez," I observed, picking myself up and controlling my ire at having been so brutally knocked over.

As we reached the street level we heard news vendors hawking an extra edition. I have always had trouble decoding the headlines they shout, but this time both Hodar and I were completely shocked by what we heard.

"YUXTRA! WUXTRA! THIRD SENN-A-TOR MOIDERED."

"Hey boy!" Hodar yelled to one of the newsboys.

A MOMENT later we were reading the startling story of Senator Williams' death:

"Senator Edward Williams from Montana (D) was murdered in his hotel apartment early this morning," Hodar read aloud. "Details of the crime have not been released by authorities save a bare mention linking his death with the sensational assassination of Senator Toms in the Senate Chamber yesterday afternoon and the discovery of Senator Shock's body in another hotel room last night."

"A severe police censorship has withheld all information concerning the whereabouts of Senator Toms' assassin. FBI and United States Secret Service agents have been put in full charge of the case and it has been hinted that the Secret Service Department would draft the services of the celebrated detective, Oscar of Mars."

Hodar put down the paper and looked at me as if to ask—where now, Sherlock?

"That's a lot of people to be killing just because the Estaban Valley is good for sugar cane," I observed.

"Don't you think it's about time we see Senator Evans?" Hodar asked. "There are some questions he's due to explain, eh, Oscar?"

I nodded thoughtfully. Actually I was not as calm within as my solid figure indicated. I was frankly worried about Senator Evans, and more so, his niece, the beautiful April Woods.

Her life was troubled enough as it was. An orphan since the world war, she had lost all traces of her family, and had been raised in England. Then, a few months ago, a chance printing of Senator Evans' photograph in a provincial British newspaper had brought uncle and niece together. I personally did not want to see such happiness destroyed by allowing some assassin's bullet to pierce the Senator's heart or to find that Senator Evans had been dragged into some un-American plot as Hodar suspected.

But I had a plan. For the moment I felt Senator Evans and April were safe. I wanted to make some progress in unraveling this fantastic crime wave before seeing April again. She was the kind of a girl who admired big, successful men like her uncle. If I were to crack this case, she would naturally admire me.

"We will present ourselves to the

Secret Service, first," I informed Hodar. "I believe I can help the government, and they can help me."

"I still think we ought to see Evans," Hodar grumbled.

LIEUTENANT TREE of the Secret Service Department shook his head violently and stood cross-legged before Hodar and me. We were alone in his office. We had been arguing for fifteen minutes.

"I'm not believing this stuff about zombies until I see it," he flatly declared. "Sure, I don't think you're kidding me, but I just can't swallow it."

"But I saw it," Hodar cut in.

Lieutenant Tree quickly picked up a phone. "Give me the morgue," he snapped in the receiver. "Quick!" The Lieutenant leaned against his desk, staring at us. He was a lean jawed, hard eyed man.

A voice squeaked in the phone. Lieutenant Tree listened intently, then he dropped the phone in its cradle and turned toward us. "That dead guy, the Toms killer, hasn't been out of the morgue," he said. "Been there all the time."

Both Hodar and I gasped, scarcely able to believe our ears.

"But we saw him last night at the Hotel Byron! He shot Senator Shock!" Hodar cried.

"Listen," said Tree, "I don't know what you saw. You're supposed to be a high-class operative, Oscar, but that corpse has been around all night. Furthermore, the coroner reports it's been dead six weeks. Funny case too—it isn't falling apart at all. But I don't see how a corpse can walk in the Senate, kill someone, then commit suicide!"

"I'll swear I saw it," Hodar insisted grimly.

Lieutenant Tree snapped his fist in

his other hand impatiently.

"What about faking these zombies?" he asked.

Hodar turned to me, knowing that if there were any fakery, an attempt to make something look like dead flesh when it was not, my sensitive tulip nose would be aware of it.

I glowed a little at this acknowledgment of my abilities. "Last night when we were in the Hotel Byron," I began, "I was aware of—"

Again the telephone jangled, cutting me short.

"What's that?" Lieutenant Tree shouted into the phone. "Zombies! A private tip! Information about them in Georgetown. What's that address,"—for a second the lieutenant scribbled a notation on his scratchpad—"Say, who's this calling?"

There was a sudden click, indicating the line was cut off. Lieutenant Tree dropped the phone. "Good God," he swore, "More zombies! Washington's full of them. They must be importing them by the carload."

WITHIN five minutes the lieutenant, Hodar and I were roaring across the city in a siren-screaming, special government car. Lieutenant Tree hadn't even bothered about the regular chauffeur. He sat behind the wheel, guiding the car at breakneck pace toward suburban Georgetown.

"Do you know where this address is?" Hodar asked.

Tree nodded grimly. "Yeah. It's a place Evans just rented for his niece. Hasn't had it fixed up yet."

"Evans—" I gasped. A sudden feeling of dread, something usually so alien to my Martian veins, ran through me. I pitted hope against hope that if Evans had come down here, April had not come along. I did not know if I could bear the prospects of her in danger.

"Can't you step on it," Hodar snapped.

Lieutenant Tree jammed the gas pedal to the floorboards. The big car rolled like a juggernaut, tires screeching as they gripped the road.

I felt a slight sense of relief when we finally raced up the tree-bordered streets of Georgetown. I barely noticed the fine old southern type mansions that distinguish the Washington suburb; my nerves were on such edge.

A moment later Lieutenant Tree swerved the car up the driveway of a tree-studded estate. The place was pleasantly beautiful in the noon sunlight. An old-fashioned, three-story house seemed to be under repair, considering the scaffolding around it.

The lieutenant pulled the car to a sudden halt at the door. Hodar and I were out in an instant. "Looks like there's no one around," I said, sweeping the deserted grounds, the porch and house-painter's scaffolding with a single swift glance. Hodar knocked at the door, then we waited. Our nerves alert and tense.

"Take it easy. Might be a trap," Lieutenant Tree hissed. He loosened his gun from a shoulder holster and held it in his hand.

An air of tenseness pervaded the place until Hodar knocked again. Suddenly the door swung inward under the pressure of his hand. Hodar pushed it wrier and peered within. Abruptly, his hand shot to his mouth in an involuntary attempt to stifle a cry of horror.

Senator Evans' body was crumpled on the hall stairway directly beyond the door. His body lay face down, legs and arms spread grotesquely, the fingers of one hand grasping a bannister post as if he had tried to drag himself up the stairs. His gray hair and back of his neck were matted with blood—the entire top of his skull had been

crushed in like a smashed egg shell.

"Holy Prophets! That leaves us only two!" Lieutenant Tree gasped.

"T-t-two?" Hodar stuttered.

"Live senators!" Tree swore angrily.

CHAPTER IV

Zombies Incorporated

I DIDN'T even bother to stop before the mutilated body of Senator Evans. I was no longer bent on uncovering crime. My job was to prevent further misfortunes. I found a telephone in an ante-room. It was connected.

Dialing Senator Evans' Washington apartment hotel, I was greatly relieved to get April Woods on the phone. She was safe, thank God! Then I broke the news to her as best I could. Her voice broke and I knew she was crying. That is to be expected of a woman.

"Listen, April," I said. "We must act quickly. For the sake of your uncle and everything he stood for in the American Senate, I want you to help me. Go immediately to Hodar the Magician's apartment. Tell his wife, Dedrie what has happened. Then the two of you must call Senators Warner and Gannes over to Hodar's place. It's a matter of life and death."

Finished calling, I returned to the crime room. Lieutenant Tree had turned the dead senator's body over after having marked the original position carefully. He was going about his business with the trained precision of a scientist; taking fingerprint markings, measuring the extent and size of the death blow, taking samples of blood on a slide.

"I doubt if that will help much," Hodar observed. "Probably end up by discovering a dead zombie did it."

"Damn the zombies!" Tree muttered.

Suddenly, something strange affected me. A curious odor assailed my nose. It was not the smell of newly shed blood; the adrenalin odor of fear that I recognized as coming from Senator Evans' ductless glands. Nor was it a second distinct odor I located in the room—the weird odor of zombies. It was something else that made my blue Martian blood pulse through my veins. Candidly I was puzzled. The odor was familiar. It was on the tip of my nose, yet I couldn't place it.

But in another moment I stopped racking my brain. Lieutenant Tree jerked a letter from the dead man's breast pocket.

"Huh, Puerto Rican Developments, Inc.," he whistled, reading the letterhead. Then his brow furrowed in sudden surprise. "Boy, this has a punch like a 16-inch gun."

I scanned the carefully typed page and gasped a little myself. It read:

Hon. Senator Evans:

With the interests of the American nation in view, our company engineers have made an exhaustive survey of the Estaban Valley and their findings indicate less suitable for military use than locations we listed for you in previous correspondence. Since the Puerto Rican Developments, Inc. has made the initial move to purchase this area for agricultural purposes, we are open to substantial losses if the Defense Bill goes through in its present form. To make good any inconvenience you may suffer in changing your present position, our original offer of \$50,000 is still open.

Sincerely,

Sr. Emanuel Vasquez

I creased the letter, made certain of the date—four days old—recorded the

smell which I identified with the gland odors had already catalogued as belonging to Señor Vasquez. "We'd better rush back to town," I said. "I believe we're going to find traces of a man with a monocle in our next move— If our two Senators are still alive when we get there!"

"OH that fate should be so cruel," I murmured. "*O mores, O tempora!*" as the Latin phrase goes. Back at Hodar's apartment April Woods allowed me to hold her hand, to be joined with her in digital bliss for the barest moment. Yet I know from the delicate scent of her tiny glands that hers was not a lover's touch.

She allowed me to console her, but she still looked upon me as a cute little living curiosity which Hodar should keep on a leash. I found her beauty breathless. I even found some fine points in her small, straight nose. And I was touched to the heart at the way she wept. Thus, again I vowed that I'd prove myself as capable a man as—as Lieutenant Tree, or Senators Warner and Gannes who were also in the apartment with us.

Of course I could hardly consider the two Senators as dangerous rivals at the moment. It seems that old men in America get much more frightened than young men.

Senator Gannes paced up and down the floor in nervous excitement. His ruddy cheeks puffed excitedly and it was no concern of his that Hodar and his pretty wife, Dedrie, were doing their best to soothe April Woods.

"I'll demand a Senate investigation of the Secret Service and the FBI," he said, scowling at Lieutenant Tree. "Incompetent! What kind of protection are we getting? Bah!"

"Okay, Senator. But quiet down," Tree insisted.

"Quiet!" Senator Warner leaped to his feet and paced beside his colleague. His nervous, darting eyes shot from beneath shaggy brows toward the door as if he expected a brace of terrifying zombies to march in at any moment. "I insist that we be properly protected," he shouted hoarsely. "I want some bodyguards—national guards."

"Listen," said Lieutenant Tree firmly. "You can sleep in the armory if that'll help. But right now, how about giving us a hand? Did you get any letters like this?"

Lieutenant Tree shoved the letter that we had taken from Senator Evans' pocket before Gannes. Gannes' reaction was instantaneous. His eyes bulged and he pushed the letter away frantically.

"Come on, spill it!" snapped Tree.

"That letter," Gannes choked. "It's the same kind!"

"So you got one," I cut in. "I suspected so. And Senator Warner got one also. Every Senator in the Six Senator Bloc received one, eh?"

"They were bribes," Warner answered shakily. "We weren't going to take them though."

"And did anyone come to talk to you about it?" I asked suddenly.

Both senators looked shocked. Then Warner nodded. "Yes. A man with a foreign accent. He wore a monocle," said Warner.

"What did he want?" Tree demanded.

"He told us it would be best to take the offer," Warner answered.

"What was his name?"

"I don't know," Warner muttered.

I nodded to the Lieutenant and Hodar, calling for a private conference in the kitchen. "Something tells me we must go in for some more fancy house-breaking," I said, blushing warmly as April passed through the kitchen to the

icebox.

"Now?" Hodar asked.

"No. After supper. Lieutenant Tree, I suggest you stay here, or go along with the Senators and the two women. There are liable to be more zombies. Hodar and I will take care of the Puerto Rican Development Company. . . . I think we're getting somewhere, eh?"

Lieutenant Tree nodded briefly. He slipped a black service automatic from his hip pocket and put it in Hodar's hand. "Better take this. I'm keeping number 2," he said, tapping the bulge under his left armpit.

"IF they've got a burglar alarm here, I can't find it," Hodar whispered as he slipped the bolts of the complicated locks holding the inner door of the Puerto Rican Developments Inc., office.

"What they have will probably be in a safe," I said.

Hodar pushed me aside, took a tighter grip on his gun and cautiously moved into the dark office. The place was deserted. I ran over to the windows and shut the venetian blinds before switching on my pocket torch. The narrow beam of the torch swept the thickly carpeted room, the broad and swanky desk, a file cabinet behind it, then a wall safe.

"Okay," said Hodar. "It's a nerve safe."

Kneeling beside the safe, he peeled off his gloves and rubbed the fingertips of his left hand with emery, wearing the skin down to a thin covering. Then with cotton, he swabbed the fingertips with benzyl-alcohol, causing the nerve-endings to be extra sensitive.

He turned the safe-dial slowly . . . left . . . right twice . . . left. His fingertips absorbed every action of the tumblers within. Then he straightened

out, pulled down the door handle and swung the thick steel panel open.

"My fingers feel as if they could read the print on the papers in this safe," Hodar grinned.

Heedless of Hodar's sense of elation, I reached in, dragging forth a plain manila envelope marked ESTABAN. Spreading the contents on the floor between us, I paged through the papers excitedly. These papers were dynamite. I realized that instantly.

There was a map of the Estaban Valley. There was a detailed geological description—not of the soil—but of mineral deposits beneath the ground there.

"Look! Hodar!" I whispered on a sudden intake of breath. "*Mercury. . . . A vast mercury deposit in the Estaban Valley!*" Then I uncovered another paper. "Here! Otto Bimler. . . . It's a letter from Bimler instructing the Developments Company to offer \$300,000 and more in bribes in order to get that valley. . . . Who's Bimler anyway?"

"G-g-good Lord!" Hodar stuttered. "Bimble! The man with the monocle! It's plain as day now. Bimler is a Nazi agent. The Puerto Rican Developments Inc., is probably a front made up of American and Puerto Rican fifth columnists. Bimler's government controls it.

"If their estimate of the island mercury deposits are correct, it means that Italy and Spain no longer hold the world's supply. The Nazi's want it. That's why they don't want U. S. Army engineers to start digging underground hangars in the Estaban valley. Our engineers would run across the mercury vein sure as shooting."

For a moment, both Hodar and I were thunderstruck by the amazing angles of this international plot. Here we were, staring at each other in a stunned

manner, while between us lay the astonishing proof of an incredible plot aimed at the very heart of American Defenses.

"Come on," said Hodar. "Let's get out of here pronto. This is FBI stuff."

We hurriedly packed the proofs back in the manila folder. Then, suddenly, I stiffened and whirled around at the suspicion of a sound. As I switched my flashlight toward the door, my jaw, at least what little jaw a Martian possesses, dropped in astonishment.

THE door had been flung open. The lights clicked on, flaring brilliantly in the room, revealing three gigantic zombies crowding through the doorway. Their dead white, corpse-odorous flesh glared sickeningly in the light. Their green expressionless eyes stared at us with fantastic emptiness.

Afraid? I wasn't afraid—but I *was* anxious. Both Hodar and I backed away, step by step, as the walking dead men came toward us like relentless beings from another world that is neither dead nor alive.

"This looks like a climax that came too soon," Hodar muttered grimly.

Suddenly he whipped out his automatic and fired point blank at the first zombie. The gun backed in a roaring blast of flame, banging a heavy lead slug into the dead walker's bared chest. The zombie hurled backward in awesome silence. A four inch wound ripped open his chest and no blood came from it.

I could see Hodar's hand begin to tremble, the hair rise at the nape of his neck. I could see him struggle to keep control of his nerves. For the wounded zombie crashed among his companions, then came forward again, marching upon us with stiff mechanical steps.

"I'm dead mad!" Hodar shouted

hoarsely. "Mad! Mad! That's what!" He laughed wildly as he pulled the trigger of his gun, pumping the hot lead into the dead men who wouldn't die.

The first zombie reached out. Hodar triggered his last bullet. It ripped up the zombie's arm, furling the fish-belly flesh back as a plowshare rips open the soil. Then Hodar hurled his gun with a curse at the dead man's face.

I grabbed a desk lamp, swinging it bat-like at the second zombie's middle. Then I saw Hodar go down. The dead men were among us, beating us down with club-like fists, hammering away with methodical, emotionless deadliness.

Even the amazing density of my skin and heaviness of my bone structure was to no avail. I was smashed to the floor and clubbed a dozen times. I felt my senses reel; knew I was being battered into unconsciousness. . . .

CHAPTER V

Hodar Is a Zombie

DAYLIGHT sort of seeped in under my eyelids and gave me some reason for opening them. I realized I was regaining consciousness, though I had no idea where I was and how long I had been in this state.

Then I learned something else. I discovered that a Martian has many human qualities, among them the ability to suffer a splitting headache and a hangover. The pain was so excruciating that I cannot understand how Earthmen can put up with "hangovers" very often.

However, as I opened my eyes wider, the pain gradually disappeared. I looked about, noting the sunlight, the trees and a superabundance of monuments on every side. Then I realized

that I was not being held prisoner and that I was lying upon a strange, flat monument.

Suddenly a horrid smell assailed my tulip nose. A nauseous hand seemed to clutch my insides and I reeled dizzily. I closed my eyes momentarily and upon opening them again, there was a soldier standing before me.

"What are you doing there?" the soldier demanded, threatening me with a bayonet.

"Where am I?" I asked sickly.

"Where are you?" the soldier gasped explosively. "You're on top of the Unknown Soldier's Monument, Arlington Cemetery, that's where you are."

"But that stench—oh, it couldn't be—," I muttered. At the same moment, I identified the cause of the odor which almost killed me. It was a wreath of flowers placed at the base of the monument by the D.A.R.

"Git going," the soldier jabbed me with the bayonet. "No circus freaks here."

"Okay," I said. I was only too happy to get out of the vicinity of that wreath.

My mind cleared rapidly as soon as I had put some distance between myself and that bed of roses. But I hardly felt happier. I was in a terrible fix. Hodar was gone. I was even afraid that he might have been killed. And the only evidence we had incriminating the Puerto Rican Developments Company was gone. Zombies! I gritted my teeth at the thought.

In this state of mind, I returned to my Washington apartment to do what every good Earthian detective does when it looks as if he's at the end of his rope. I went home to take a shower, have a Martini and tone up. I also made a few phone calls and received a number of boxes from art supply houses and chemists. I was working up an idea.

"If people can cover the taste of a steak with tobasco," I said to myself, "Then I ought to—"

"What the hell are you doing here?" a voice said behind me.

"LIEUTENANT TREE!" I cried. "But where are Dedrie, April and the two Senators? You can't leave them alone."

Tree scowled at the piles of gums, varnishes and pale plastics spread across a couple of tables and upon the couch. "I just left them at Senator Warren's place," he said. "But what the hell are you up to? Where's Hodar?"

I quickly recounted my experiences of the previous night while Tree listened almost incredulously. "So why didn't you call me?" he demanded.

"Because I wanted to find out how plastics bend," I said. "It does!"

I stepped back from my worktable and picked up a false hand I had modeled from a new formula of plastics, common resin and India gum. I demonstrated how the fingers bent, plastic creasing at the knuckles like human skin; how thin slices of enameled wood could be made to resemble finger nails.

Lieutenant Tree stared at my handiwork in a puzzled fashion, then slowly, the full meaning dawned upon him. "The zombies," he cried. "Is that how they were made? They're fakes?"

"What do you think?" I answered.

"But they aren't statues," Tree said. "What makes them move? What makes them kill?"

I scooped up a handful to carry on my demonstration when the insistent buzzing of the phone cut me short. Instantly, upon lifting the apparatus, I knew something was wrong. Senator Williams' halting voice wailed in my ear, half hysterical, gasping and incoherent.

"Hodar. . . can't. . . Hodar. . . April kidnaped."

A sharp click cut the connection.

"Operator! Operator!" I shouted frantically, clicking the phone cradle up and down madly. At this moment I couldn't act in my usual cool manner for I was oppressed with the image of beautiful April Woods in danger.

I slammed the phone down in desperation. "Come on, Tree! Step on it!" I yelled. "Williams' apartment."

THERE was a crowd in the hall at Senator Williams' apartment. A hotel shamus and two District patrolmen kept the curious away from the door when Lieutenant Tree and I shouldered our way in.

"He's gone nuts!" one of the patrolmen addressed us.

"Who?" Tree asked.

"The Senator."

Entering the room, I stumbled, then drew my breath in sharply. At my feet was the twisted, horribly mangled body of a Secret Service guard Tree had ordered to remain with the two senators. He was dead.

"Zombies!" I said curtly.

I rushed through the apartment, searching for April and Dedrie. Then, in the bedroom, I came to an abrupt halt, staring wide-eyed. Senator Williams tossed upon the bed like a raving maniac. He was in a straight jacket and was held down by another District policeman.

The senator's hair was matted, his eyes bulged with glazed terror. His face and drooling lips twisted as if he were waging a fantastic struggle against some unseen foe.

"They're coming after me!" he screamed, his voice ranging shrilly, tearing the cords in his rigid throat. "Don't. . . Don't let them come near . . . keep away. . ." He stared

idiotically toward me, mouth slaverling. ". . . Don't, Oh, God. . . Don't let them come. . ."

"Shut up!" A slap across the face silenced him for an instant. The policeman turned toward me, shaking his head. "Right off the deep end," he said.

Williams let out a sudden terrifying scream. . . .

"Z-Z-ZOMBIES! HE'S A ZOMBIE!"

I nodded to the policeman. He crumpled a corner of a pillow and gagged it into the senator's mouth, muffling his wild, incoherent ravings. "We found him like this," said the policeman. "He banged around here, busting up furniture, overturning tables, tearing his shirt to shreds. He must have gone through hell!"

"Did he talk?" snapped Lieutenant Tree.

"Yeah, about the same as he's been talking. Terrible stuff," the policeman shook his head grimly. "As much as I was able to make of it, five of them zombies busted in here. That's what drove him mad. They came in, mangled one fellow, you saw him at the door."

"And the others?" Tree snapped. "Senator Gannes and the two women?"

"Gannes? Yeah he said that name. Gannes and the other two—zombies took them off. And for a while too, he was raving about this guy, Hodar."

"Hodar?" I cut in.

"Yeah. This Hodar was at the head of them zombies," said the policeman. "The Senator was raving a lot. Mixed up. He raved that Hodar is a zombie. That he had green eyes and he was dead looking."

For an instant my mind spun in wild turmoil. "*Hodar, a Zombie!*" I gasped.

I TRIED to shake off the dreadful fear that swept into my heart; a fear

of something even more weird and maddening than anything I had ever imagined. I wanted to be sane. But how could I?

To this very instant I had been working out a theory that the zombies were not real; that they were the product of some mad scientific brain; that they could be explained in terms of my laboratory findings. I had to admit defeat now. There was someone in Washington who had mastered the fantastic Voodoo secrets. *There was someone who could bring the dead back to life!*

"Hodar is a zombie," I murmured bitterly. "They've murdered him. Now they've made him one of the living dead." A murderous hate welled in my heart against the callous fiend who had displayed a master cunning at every turn.

"This is going to be the crime case of the century," Lieutenant Tree cut in sourly. "The Lindbergh snatch was baby talk. We've lost five senators. The sixth is on the borderline. They got Hodar and both the women. Good God—what next?"

I gritted my teeth, realizing how hopeless my plans seemed. "We've got to track the zombies down. We've got to haul in Otto Bimler, Señor Vasquez. We've got to find Señor Damballa. Even if we can't save Hodar, there might be a chance to save April and Dedrie and Gannes. We'll bargain with them." I said.

One of the policemen, on guard in the outer hall, called into the room. "Oscar? Letter for you. Special."

My nerves pulsed excitedly. I knew there could only be one reason for a letter reaching me at Senator Williams' apartment. Ripping the envelope apart, my eyes swept the typed note. For an instant, the world seemed to crumble beneath me.

"Dear Oscar"—the note read—"I have made a terrible error. I intend to give myself up to the police. But before doing so, I wish to talk with you first. It's important. Come alone. The second four-column estate west of Evans' in Georgetown.

"Hodar."

Hodar writing me notes, wanting to talk with me! The thought drummed in my brain. Could he be dead? Zombies don't talk. Zombies can't write. Was Hodar still alive? Was he implicated in this horrible plot against his own nation? But that was impossible. Senator Williams had seen him walk in, green eyed, deathly white.

"This note is a trap," I decided. "Señor Damballa probably forced Dedrie to write it."

I crumpled the note in a little ball and faced Lieutenant Tree. "Give me your guns!" I said.

"Where are you going?" Tree demanded.

"I'm going alone," I said stiffly. "If I don't come back, look this up." I tossed the crumpled note on a table.

I slung a cross harness over my shoulders, fitting a bulky holster beneath each armpit. I slipped two .45's into the saddles, seeing that they rode easily and were set for rapid-fire draws. Suddenly I remembered, and from one of the guns I ejected Lieutenant Tree's ammunition, refilling the clips with special bullets I carried in my pocket.

"I'm taking your car," I told Tree. The Lieutenant was on the phone, barking out orders to have Bimler and Vasquez picked. He stared after me disconcertedly.

"Hey! Wait a minute," he yelled.

BUT I was on my way. Lieutenant Tree's official car swerved through the streets of Washington under the

steady guidance of my hand. I could get more out of an automobile than any Earthman for my knowledge of what steel and machinery can accomplish, my intimate knowledge of motors, far surpassed that of any Earthian engineer.

I pushed the car to its limit, doing it automatically, allowing my mind to work rapidly in other fields. I hastily reconstructed the events of the past few days: the horrible murder in the Senate, the suicide zombie, his re-appearance as Señor Damballa, the other murders, Bimler, the Developments Company. I fitted together the odor deductions my own tulip nose had uncovered.

The conclusions that resulted, frightened me. They were almost inconceivable. The brain behind the zombie-terror plot was crazed, yet insidiously clever.

The car entered the suburban limits of Georgetown. In a moment I would have my final chance—a showdown with the maniac behind the zombies. It was either myself or them. I swerved the car past the place where we had discovered Evans' body, drove west along a private roadway, finally slowing down at the address Hódar had given.

Suddenly I jammed on the brakes. There was an obstruction across the road. I cut off the motor and slipped from behind the seat. Then, abruptly, I felt the hard muzzle of a shotgun jab into my back.

CHAPTER VI

Little Mars Man—In a Jam

THREE expressionless zombies stood behind me, their green eyes fastened upon me in a rigid stare. They made no sound, gave no orders as they urged me on at the point of their guns. I was dazed. The trap had been sprung

sooner than I expected.

It was no use fighting back now. My only chance lay in being led to the zombie lair where I would come face to face with their leader. There was still a slim chance. The zombies had failed to disarm me. The .45's were still clamped under my arm-pits, hidden beneath my feather-suit.

With mechanical movements, the zombies urged me along a path that wound through a tree-shrouded park. Then at a cross path they had me turn left. We were going backward toward the Evans' mansion, not the address I had received. We approached the rear of the house and I was forced down a badly lit cellar stairway.

A doorway opened into a subterranean room. The zombies crowded in behind me, their cold, unreal breath chilling the nape of my neck. The door clicked shut. I swept my gaze over the room, straining to delineate shapes and figures in the dim light shed by a single, dust sheathed bulb.

Suddenly my nostrils fluttered like the copper leaves in a Leyden jar. My muscles grew tense. This is my natural reaction to death and horror. For in one corner of the room, row after row, were a dozen corpses—the sleeping dead. Then my nose picked up another odor that was strangely puzzling.

I looked further, beyond the corpses into a second room where my gaze suddenly riveted upon an approaching figure. The strangely familiar shape didn't register on my mind at first. Then it came closer, and I caught my breath. . . .

"Hódar!" I gasped.

The figure neared me, moving with jerky, unyielding steps. I stared, almost speechless, almost doubtful of my own sanity. In the indistinct light I recognized Hódar's features. They sent a chill through me. His flesh seemed

bloated and had the awful pallor of the dead. His mirthless lips were fixed in a thin bloodless slash. His eyes stared at me like expressionless, green smudges.

Then he stopped a few feet away, rocking upon his feet. "You've come," he spoke in a muffled voice that was not his own. "So you've come. Good."

I began sniffing, cataloguing odors.

"You're not Hodar," I cried.

A muffled, insane chuckle answered me. "I am Señor Damballa, master of voodoo. I inhabit the dead Hodar's body. It is my power to enter and control any of the living dead. I become the soul and the voice in the walking dead."

Señor Damballa laughed harshly, his voice rattling with egotistic madness.

"By the Martian gods, who are you?" I demanded. I was stalling for time, hoping to get some inkling as to the whereabouts of April, Dedrie and the Senator.

"I am Damballa. You'll soon know my power." Señor Damballa signalled the three zombies behind me to take their posts near the entrance stairway.

I THOUGHT it strange for the zombie's seemed to stare, not at Damballa, but beyond him into the further room as if they were getting their orders from there. Then my blood chilled. A painful scream came from that other room. It stopped abruptly.

Señor Damballa and one of the zombie guards leaped across my path, blocking the way. "The prisoners," Damballa chuckled scornfully. He pulled a gun from his belt, levelling it at me. "You need not bother about the prisoners. Don't move," he said. "I have other plans for you and your queer little body. You're in my way too often."

"That's my business," I answered

coolly. The maniac's gun in no way frightened me for my own skin was impervious to bullets. He seemed not to know that.

"You," Damballa laughed in a muffled grating tone, "you need not think of your friends. You are about to die. . . . Such a joke, it makes me laugh—" Damballa's voice rose to an insanely high pitch. "You will become the first Martian zombie. I shall do to you as I did to this body of your friend, Hodar."

He waved his gun toward the row of lifeless cadavers against the wall. "You will soon join them. Only a moment now. Then I'll restore you as a living dead man."

"And what about the others?" I demanded.

"Your friends?" Damballa laughed. "I'll use them as I see fit. The fat senator, the one called, Gannes will be charged with the murder of his companions. The police will find him in a delirious state, but with sufficient evidence upon his body."

I edged a little away from Damballa. I prepared to leap into action. Hastily I measured my chances to get to my friends before the zombie guards cut me off with their superior weight.

"You've overlooked one point that will wreck your plans, Damballa!" I hissed.

"So?"

"You forgot that I had a nose," I answered evenly. "A sensitive nose. *That body you occupy isn't Hodar's—and it isn't dead!*"

Señor Damballa stiffened. Slowly, coldly, he raised his gun and squeezed the trigger. A roaring blast of flame almost blinded me. Something hit me a stunning blow on the chest. I staggered back a step.

"Die! Martian! Die!" Damballa thundered.

HE pumped the trigger of his gun, blasting the whole barrel at me. Then he backed away, stunned! I hadn't fallen. He saw me there, standing like a ghost. I gasped a little for the impact of the bullets was like sledgehammer blows even though they ricocheted off my salamander-like skin.

"It's my turn now, Damballa!" I snapped.

A zombie guard lumbered toward me, pumping a hail of bullets that flew around me like angry insects. I whipped out my two .45's and prepared to fight my way through. A second and third zombie guard closed in after the first. I sighted my guns quickly upon the zombie's heart and squeezed. My guns bucked one after the other, hurling twin slugs into the dead flesh.

The first zombie reeled backward and crashed to the floor. In a flash, I saw he wasn't coming back. *I had killed a zombie!*

I pumped slugs into the next two, swerving my guns in rapid fire, blasting flame and thunder at the walking dead men, ripping inch-wide wounds in the center of their bloodless chests. They went down like hammered oxen.

I whirled, sensing danger behind me. Damballa charged upon me, pounding his fist across my shoulder like a dozen pounds of lead. Pain stabbed through my body and I lost the grip on my guns.

I battled desperately against his greater weight. In hand-to-hand combat, I was at a disadvantage. Smaller in build, shorter in arm length, I couldn't hold him at bay. He crashed into me, bashing the wind out of my lungs.

His weight seemed to increase, bearing down on me, weakening me. A fist that felt as if it were made of ridged steel plowed into my face. I rocked back, stunned. Again an iron blow

rocked me. My sight seemed to blur under the angry onslaught. . . .

Suddenly thunder crashed from the stairway door. I felt Damballa's huge body totter, then fall heavily, pinning me underneath. Oddly, it seemed to roll over. Warm hands grabbed me.

"Oscar! You're okay."

I SAW Lieutenant Tree's lean face whirling before my eyes. I held myself stiffly, getting control of my faculties.

"I almost lost," I said. "Must make a note of that. Have to learn jiu-jitsu."

"Boy you wiped them out," Tree said in admiration. "I came as soon as possible after I got word the force had rounded up Otto Bimler and raided the Puerto Rican Developments Company. I followed the address on that note, got mixed up, so I decided to have another look at this place. Made it just in time to clip this godawful specimen off . . . What or who is it? . . . My God, it does look like Hodor!"

"It's Señor Vasquez of the Puerto Rican Developments Inc.," I said. "He's under a couple of coats of plastic."

"Yeah, but Vasquez was a small guy?"

"Look under the plastic," I added. "You'll probably find him dressed in a suit of medieval Spanish armor."

My strength revived, I ran into the second room. There I found April Woods on the floor, unconscious. "She must have fainted a half dozen times. I don't blame her," said Tree. "A little liquor will pull her through."

At the sound of our voices, April's eyelids fluttered, then opened. She looked ravishingly beautiful, her hair undone and swirling upon her shoulders, her lips parted in half query.

"Where are the others?" I asked.

April shuddered, then steeling her-

self, she nodded toward a grill doorway. "In there," she murmured, tiredly.

Tree unfastened the door and a moment later he reappeared with the frightened Senator Gannes, Dedrie and Hodar. The senator looked disheveled. He mumbled some disconnected little speech about "Senate investigation." Meanwhile, Hodar and Dedrie were repeating that Earth phenomenon which I have never been able to understand—the placing of one lip over the other. Kissing . . . that's what it's called.

Lieutenant Tree turned to me with a rather helpless look on his face. "Listen, Oscar," he said. "How about giving me some sort of story so I can put a report together when I get back to town?"

"All right. Where'll we start?" I said.

"With the Senate murder. You were there!"

I moved over to where Señor Damballa's bullet-ridden body lay. With a pocket knife, I ripped away a thin layer of fleshlike plastic, revealing the gleaming surface of a medieval suit of armor. Within the armor was the still body of Señor Emanuel Vasquez.

"Your bullets must have gotten him through the visor and throat plates," I began. "You see, one of his green eyes is shattered. It was glass."

"Go on," said Tree.

"Well, when the first Senator Toms was killed, we had a zombie on our hands. It reappeared again the Hotel Byron as Señor Damballa. Actually it wasn't the same one. Our Hotel Byron zombie was Vasques, made up to look like zombie one who was in the morgue. He also made himself up as Hodar to enter Senator Williams' apartment. The armor protected him, acted as a disguise and gave him the jerky movements of a zombie.

"When I was in the Hotel Byron that night, my nose told me there was something fishy about Señor Damballa. He didn't smell like a dead man. He smelled half human, half synthetic."

Lieutenant Tree grinned. "Pretty simple now that it's all over. We've got Bimler and he was probably backing Vasquez."

"It's not over," I said. "The zombie idea wasn't Vasques' brain child. There was someone else who knows about Voodooism. That someone was in the Senate gallery the day Toms was murdered."

I paused a moment, watching the faces of those around me. I could see Senator Gannes' lips quiver. Hodar's arm tightened around Dedrie.

Tree stared at me sharply. He wet his lips, asking, "Who?"

"April Woods!" I said.

THE silence that followed could have been cut with a knife. All eyes swerved toward April whose cheeks suddenly drained of blood. Then Dedrie gasped, staring at the pistol April leveled at me.

"You think you'll turn me in," April laughed scornfully. She squeezed the trigger. There was a blast of flame. I fell back a step under the impact of the bullet that flattened against my chest.

Instantly Lieutenant Tree knocked the weapon from April's hand and pinned her arms. "You fool," he cried. April struggled violently, then began to sob.

"They always make the mistake of shooting at me," I observed somewhat sadly for I still thought April was extremely beautiful.

"Dammit," said Lieutenant Tree. "How'd you figure this out?"

"Logically," I answered. "Of course I didn't suspect April until almost the last. Love is blind, you know. But I

knew there was a leak somewhere. The night we met Damballa at the Byron, he knew Hodar was masquerading as Senator Evans. Who informed him? Only Evans and April knew our plans. She also knew we were raiding the Puerto Rican Company offices and so the zombies caught us there.

"Then, when we found Senator Evans dead in this building my nose recorded a bewildering smell. *Damiana*; the compressed oil of *damiana* and essences of volatile oils—a perfume which on my planet means *dangerous love*. How did that odor get here when April was supposed to be in town? Naturally, she was here. She had lured the Senator here."

Hodar's lovely wife stared at April incredulously. "But Senator Evans was April's uncle?" she gasped.

I shook my head. "I'm afraid even Evans was duped by his so-called long lost niece," I explained succinctly *April Woods is not Evans' niece!* From a scientific viewpoint, I might add that she's not a blonde either!

"She's one of these smooth foreign

agents, probably Spanish. The prize Bimler, Vasquez and April were after was so big it was worth checking into the history of the various senators to locate a lost niece. Thus they were on the inside. April gave herself away by using *damiana*, a perfume extremely popular among Latin women, but seldom used by their northern sisters because it's too strong."

"Hm, I see," Tree grunted. "That's why we found her first. She faked that faint of hers."

Senator Gannes pushed forward. He had apparently found his voice and was no longer muttering about investigations.

"Say," he demanded worriedly. "Those other zombies are fakes, too, aren't they? You killed them and you can't kill zombies. Who are they?"

I felt tired, but I explained patiently.

"Oh, the zombies," I said. "Well, if you look at the ledgers of the U. S. Arsenal you'll notice a small item of six silver dollars melted down for National Defense. Silver Bullets. Those *were* real zombies."*

*Arthur J. Burks, writer and ex-marine, is one of the men who tells of zombies, and science has definitely proved his story is right, and that the zombie of Haiti does exist. How this uncanny undead creature is controlled is not known, but the

secrets of that dark island may some day be unearthed. At least it is true that weird beings in human guise do roam those jungles. Whether they are alive or dead cannot be said. Most authorities tell us it is a powerful form of hypnotism.—Ed.

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 6)

QUITE obviously, we did the right thing in presenting humorous stories in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Because Wm. P. McGivern's *Dynamouse* story had you emitting belly-laughes, besides being a swell action yarn. Bill's back again this issue with another humorous short, "Adopted Son Of The Stars," which should roll you in aisles. By the way, "The Dynamouse" got your approval to the extent of being a first-place story!

SOMETIMES your editor fishes around in a top hat and pulls out a winner. It seems we did exactly that with "Oscar, Detective of Mars." This cute little fellow—one of our readers said she liked him because he was so nice and round!—has captured your hearts as no other Martian ever has, and he bids fair to become a real "big shot" in the fiction world.

Anyway, James Norman rushed him into new adventures, and he's in this issue.

HERE'S one they tell about Eando Binder. It seems the editor of *Amazing Stories* had an unfinished Adam Link story scheduled, and press time was only a few days away. But Binder was nowhere to be found, and the story was unfinished. Finally, in desperation, the whole staff gathered to discuss the ending of the story and write it themselves. Which wasn't so easy. In fact, they were stumped. Adam was at the bottom of a bottomless pit, ringed in by flames on one side and a ferocious dragon on the other. He had no ropes, no ladders, no rocket ship, no strato-plane; in short, he was helpless. How to get him out of this pickle? The deadline grew nearer. And the editor tore his hair. He was ruined!

Then, in walked Binder! He was escorted to a typewriter, made comfortable, and the whole staff of *Amazing Stories* gathered around. How would the master solve this insurmountable problem? Anxiously they waited.

Calmly Binder removed his gloves, placed his fingers on the keys and wrote: "With one mighty

spring, Adam Link leaped out of the bottomless pit."

STRANGE things go on in this second World War. Now they're using trained seals to track down submarines!

Maybe there's nothing to the story, but our informant swears the English are trying to train seals to find U-boats. If anybody can confirm this, we'd like to have the full story.

Anyway, we do have some interesting dope on how submarines are tracked down by scientific means. One means is by a "hydrophone," which is an ordinary telephone which uses water as a conductor instead of wire. As in air, a sound wave in water will register against a diaphragm as a series of mechanical impulses. A rubber diaphragm immersed in water thus will detect the beat of a submarine's engines and transmit it through a carbon chamber, to earphones.

As in ordinary hearing, a sound from one side will reach the near ear slightly sooner than the far ear. This difference human beings translate into "direction"—and by angling a hydrophone with two receivers until the sound coming into each ear is equal, an observer can line up his instrument with an invisible submarine.

BUT Uncle Sam has an even better way. Remarkable instruments known as MV tubes. It is all done by electricity, and the beat of a propeller can be picked up 50 miles away! Position can be determined to within one degree! And distance, course, and speed are instantaneously registered and rung up to be read off automatically on a dial!

BUT when the sub is located, science has one more trick up its sleeve! Formerly the sub-chaser, once in the vicinity of its quarry, could only drop its depth bombs and hope to make a hit. But now they have bombs that don't need contact to explode. Their detonators work by water pressure, which is proportional to depth—and once they are set for the submarine's known depth, the story is ended!

NOW, if there's anything you'd like us to dig out of our notebook, why not drop us a line and express your wishes?—*Raf.*



"I'm afraid you're a little late, Reverend. The missionary from Venus got here first."

Pantastic



GIOVANNI PUCELLI, WHO
PERPETRATED THE
HAIL SHOOTER
HOAX ON ITALIAN
FARMERS IN 1899,



PUCELLI INVENTED THIS GARGANTUAN
BLUNDERBUS, CLAIMED ABLE TO DISPERSE
IMPENDING HAILSTORMS BY FIRING ALOFT
A WHIRLING RING OF SMOKE AND GAS,
AND SOLD 10,000 OF THEM IN ITALY.



BECAUSE OF THE GREAT DANGER
OF HAILSTORMS WHICH WOULD
RUIN CROPS OF GRAPES, FARMERS
WERE UNABLE TO GET STORM INSURANCE,



hoaxes

THE HAIL-STORM GUN

By DOUGLAS NELSON RHODES

FINANCIAL returns attained by hoaxers as a result of fraudulent activities have seldom equaled those of Giovanni Pucelli. It was he who introduced the "Hail Shooter" to Italian farmers in 1899. Pucelli, an unemployed iron salesman at the time invented the fantastic device, as a means of creating a job for himself in the iron industry.

The incredible machine and its glib-tongued inventor received instantaneous attention because certain atmospheric disturbances had caused a series of devastating hailstorms to descend on the agricultural regions of Italy during the latter part of the nineteenth century, laying waste to vineyards and plunging hundreds of grape growers into bankruptcy.

It all had its beginnings one day when Pucelli, while vainly trying to obtain employment in Genoa, met a farmer whom he knew. In the course of their conversation, the farmer bemoaned the fact that his bankers had refused to accept a lien on his future grape crop as security for a loan.

"There are thousands of farmers like myself," he told the jobless iron salesman, "who cannot borrow on their vineyards because hail may come at any moment and wipe them out. Hail insurance rates are prohibitive to all but the richest. If someone could invent something to keep the hail away he would make a fortune."

Pucelli went home and pondered the problem. How could he take advantage of this golden opportunity? He was ignorant of any knowledge of meteorology. His only training was for salesmanship in the field of iron products. But he remembered hearing somewhere that heavy explosions were supposed to create meteorological disturbances in the air; that copious rainfall was popularly believed to follow in the wake of battles. Suddenly a great idea flashed upon him. Why not a hail-shooting cannon—a mighty gun which would fire aloft a whirling ring of smoke and gas instead of a projectile?

A cannon strong enough to withstand the force of a terrific explosion would certainly need a great deal of iron in its construction. The more the better, thought Pucelli, and who could tell—perhaps it really would prevent hail from forming. At any rate, Giovanni Pucelli would once more taste an era of personal prosperity.

Pucelli's first step in putting his plan into action was to make drawings of his projected storm

artillery; his second, to build a small wooden model. He then was ready to approach the owner of a foundry, one of his former employers, and there lay the fabulous plan before him. It is not known whether the enterprising Pucelli confided to the manufacturer his own secret conviction that the ingenious cannon was probably valueless as a hail-disperser, but he certainly did convince him of the great potential market which could be created for it.

A demonstrator was built in the foundry. It consisted of a heavy iron tripod supporting a large bore gun barrel, its muzzle fitted with a long, sheet-iron funnel which pointed skyward at a forty-five degree angle.

Pucelli polished up his selling technique and set out to canvass the agricultural districts with his gargantuan blunderbuss while the foundry retooled and prepared to manufacture hail shooters on a large scale.

Every detail of Pucelli's hoax was carried out in a thorough and business-like manner. He even took out a patent on his cannon and sought every means of obtaining widespread free publicity. Public demonstrations for the press and public officials were frequently arranged—but only after Pucelli had first satisfied himself that the chances of encountering a hailstorm on that date was remote. Once, however, he came near to being exposed when the sky became suddenly overcast while he was delivering his preliminary sales talk to a group of prospects and newspapermen.

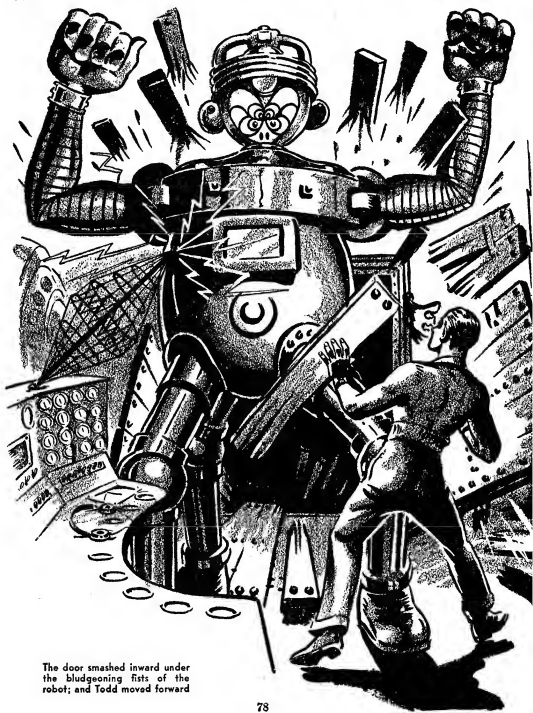
When the time arrived for firing the mortar, hail was already falling but the nervy Pucelli remained cool and unperturbed.

"Now I shall have a real opportunity to show you how effectively my cannon can break up a hailstorm!" he cried exultantly. "I have but to load it with a charge of my specially prepared gunpowder and chemical mixture, touch the firing lever, and boom! No more hail! Only a light drizzle of rain which will benefit instead of destroy your crops!"

The audience was impressed. Pucelli strode confidently over to the box-wagon which carried his anti-hail ammunition and disappeared inside. He reappeared a moment later howling with rage and dismay.

"That hopeless fool of an assistant!" he wailed, "That empty-headed boy who has charge of load—"
(Concluded on page 88)

The **THOUGHT**



The door smashed inward under the bludgeoning fists of the robot; and Todd moved forward

ROBOT

by JOHN
YORK CABOT

**Roy Todd and Michael Cole invented
a thought-controlled robot but didn't
want it to react to dream waves too!**

ROY TODD watched the silver coin spin upward toward the cracked ceiling, shining brightly in the illumination of the lone light bulb.

"Let it fall," he said.

Michael Cole stepped aside, and the coin clinked to the dusty floor, rolled momentarily, then stopped. Todd looked at his partner. "This is it," he grinned.

Simultaneously, the two bent over the coin, almost cracking heads together in their eagerness. The Goddess

of Liberty stared up at them.

"Heads," Michael exclaimed. "You win, Roy. Our brain child will answer to your commands from now on—if he answers to any."

Todd looked across the laboratory at the monstrous thing of wires and steel—their robot—the product of four slavish years of sweat and toil on the part of Michael and himself.

Propped up against the wall, this grotesque creature was the symbol of their dreams, of the burning ambitions they'd



shared since their days together as students in the University.

A Thought Robot—the first of its kind—a machine constructed to respond to the electrical thought vibrations of the human mind!

Todd let his hand fall on Michael's shoulder. "It has to work," he reminded him. "It *has* to."

Michael's handsome features crinkled in a grin, and he brushed his ebony black hair out of his eyes in a characteristic gesture of impatience.

Todd went over to the electro-transmission apparatus next to the Robot, and Michael took his place beside the iron monster. The head-phones were over Todd's ears, and Michael threw the switch. Instantly the indicator needle on the transmitter began to flicker. Delicately, Michael began to make the adjustments. It was necessary that the electro-receptor box on the Robot's chest be tuned in perfectly to his friend's thought wave-length. Which was why they had flipped the coin, for no two mind wave-lengths have a similar vibration. If the Robot were to answer commands at all, it would only do so for those thoughts carried over a particular vibratory key.

Breathlessly Todd waited, as the other turned first to the transmitter then to the vibratory receptor on the Robot's chest. His strong fingers were swift, sure, as they adjusted the dial on the chest of the iron man.

Todd slipped the headphones off, and Michael disconnected the transmitter boxes and the transmission indicators from the Robot. If the experiment was to be successful, they would know in the next few moments.

They placed the metal monster erect on its feet. Then Michael stood back and looked at Todd. "Ready, Roy?"

Todd nodded, feeling the palms of his hands suddenly become moist, his knees

shaky. Stepping back from the Robot several yards, he paused. What would be his first command? Motion.

Todd looked toward Michael, then back to the Robot. "Walk to the far window!" he directed. It seemed as though every fiber of his brain was torn by the mental force he threw behind that command.

The silence was broken only by Michael's heavy breathing. The Robot was motionless.

Fists clenched, Todd hurled every last atom of concentration into the repeated command. "Walk to the far window!" he directed again.

The seconds that followed seemed like separate eternities. And there was still no motion from the Robot. Todd saw Michael was looking anxiously at him, and in the silence the ticking of the clock on the table sounded like swift strokes on a metallic drum. In Michael's eyes was a wordless question.

Todd couldn't stand it any longer. "It's no use," he blurted despairingly.

Michael's shoulders sagged dejectedly. His voice was lifeless, beaten. "It's beyond me," he said, "all our figures and calculations are correct. The Robot receptor is set at exactly the same ratio as your thought vibrations. According to all that we've discovered . . ." the words trailed off.

"Sure," Todd said with a wry grin. "It should work. That's what every crack-pot inventor says about his brain child." He knew he couldn't force lightness any longer. The grin slipped from his face as he slumped into a chair, burying his head in his hands. Was this the end of their dream?

MICHAEL was silently gathering their papers and blue prints from the littered lab tables, stuffing them into drawers. When at last he had assem-

bled the more delicate apparatus, placing it on a shelf in the corner, he spoke.

"Mary is about due." Todd glanced at his wrist watch.

"Yes," said Michael, "due for our success banquet." His voice was thick with the bitterness that comes in the wake of a shattered dream.

Mary Shaw, Michael, and Todd had grown up together as kids in the same small town, Todd reflected. When they went to college they went together, for they were an inseparable trio. Their successes and failures had always been shared and shared alike among them. Three Musketeers stuff, Todd recalled. But during the last year the relationship had been slightly altered. There was something more than comradeship between Michael and Mary. Todd had seen it in their eyes, their glances. It was easy to tell. For Roy Todd loved Mary Shaw himself.

Their success banquet—they had been so certain that tonight was to see the completion of their dream—was now a pathetic parody. Todd thought of the table with the checkered cloth upstairs in his drab room. The last of their miserable savings had gone into the "spread" for the banquet. There were anchovies, cheese hors'd'oeuvres, and a tall bottle of champagne resting in solitary splendor in a bucket of crushed ice.

Michael was speaking. "I suppose we'd better get upstairs to meet Mary."

Todd nodded, and followed him out of the now darkened laboratory, up the creaking wooden steps to the room.

A few minutes later Mary arrived.

She had brought a huge bouquet of flowers from somewhere, and her entrance was unconsciously graceful, beautiful. It must have been raining outside, for tiny drops of water still sparkled in her wind-tossed auburn hair. There was something elfin about

her beauty. She had a wide, generous mouth and gray eyes that were at once cool and deep. Her pert nose wrinkled enhancingly as she smiled, and the sweater and skirt she wore under her polo coat accentuated the loveliness of her slender boyish figure.

"Is the Robot going to serve us dinner, gentlemen?" That was her entrance line, spoken casually, lightly, until she read the answer in their eyes. Mary bit her lip, then. "I . . . I'm sorry," she said softly. "I was so sure for you both."

The silence was awkward. Neither Michael nor Todd could think of anything appropriate. Somehow they were finally seated around the checkered table, and had managed to force a semblance of gaiety and laughter.

Todd knew Mary was trying desperately to pull them out of their despair, and gradually, as the champagne diminished, they were able to feel a little better. But Todd realized all were miserably aware of what a pathetic travesty the affair was. And in addition to that, he was acutely conscious of Mary and Michael; of the looks that they exchanged.

THEY were staring at their empty glasses and smoking silently when Michael cleared his throat. "We've gone a long way in our chase of a dream, eh, Roy?"

Todd nodded, "But we aren't licked yet, Michael. Tomorrow we can dig in again, and again and again, if necessary. We'll hit it yet, fellow."

Suddenly he was aware that something was wrong. Michael's face was flushed, and his eyes avoided Todd's as he spoke. Then he remembered that Michael had seemed nervous ever since Mary's arrival.

"Roy," Michael said hurriedly, "I've been offered a pretty decent job with a

scientific house in the East." He paused and wiped his face with a handkerchief. "It means permanency, Roy, and the chance to live as a human being. And I wonder if you'd mind—"

"If you'd take it?" Todd finished for him. He forced the smile that came to his face, hanging on while a sudden emptiness ached in his chest. Michael was walking out, but even as he realized this he knew he couldn't find it in his heart to blame him. They might work for years without ever finding success with the Thought Robot. Michael couldn't get married on the meager existence that their experiment would hold him to, and there was Mary.

It was then that he really understood the situation. It was so clear and simple that Todd was amazed he hadn't realized it sooner. They were both leaving it unspoken, but he knew that they couldn't be expected to deny themselves happiness any longer. They'd given four years to the Robot so far.

"You'd be a fool not to take it, Michael," Todd heard his voice as if from a distance. Why didn't they come right out and tell him what had happened to two of them? Todd told himself, couldn't they see that he knew? Or, the thought made him suddenly uncomfortable, did they suspect that he loved Mary?

"I knew you'd see what I mean," Michael was saying. "It's fine of you to understand." He was standing now, shaking Todd's hand.

"Forget it, fella," Todd said with a lightness that he didn't feel. "I'll be glad to get rid of you."

Todd held Mary's coat as she slipped into it. Michael stood self-consciously at the door, waiting. "I'll probably see you tomorrow night," he said, "and talk things over."

"Sure thing," Todd's voice was husky. "I'll be expecting you."

Mary reached out and caught his hand. "Please," she said. "Don't let this discourage you, Roy. You'll lick the darned thing yet. Your theory is sound."

He smiled at her. "How do you know it is?"

"You believe in it," she said quietly. "That's enough for me."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," he said. "I hope you're right."

FOR OVER AN hour after they were gone, Todd sat smoking and staring into the fire. Self pity was an insidious emotion, but he finally snapped himself out of it. By the time he climbed into bed, his mind was occupied with more practical matters. Harton, the proprietor of the scientific supply house near the village, had been to see him earlier in the day. Todd owed him a little over a hundred dollars. Harton hadn't been pleasant, blustering and shouting around until Todd almost felt like throttling him.

"Damn all creditors," Todd muttered. He yawned and switched off the tiny light by his bed.

For a while the events of the day flashed before his eyes like the slides of a kaleidoscope. Michael and Mary, the failure of the Robot, the rotten tempered Mr. Harton, all of this flashed through his weary mind in a jumbled crazy quilt pattern. Finally, Todd slept . . .

HIS head was aching terribly when Todd woke the following morning. It was raining outside, a sort of slanting drizzle that blotted into the muddy earth. Todd had put a cigarette into the corner of his mouth when he remembered his dream. The room was quite warm, but he shivered a little as it flashed back to him.

The details were more or less hazy,

but he remembered one gruesome fact. He had strangled Harton and thrown him over a cliff. Sitting there on the side of the bed, Todd tried to piece together the rest of the dream, remembering that Mary and Michael had entered into it somehow, but the rest of it eluded him.

"Champagne and cheese," he muttered. "Never again!"

Todd was shaved and dressed when Mrs. Murtaugh, his Irish landlady knocked timidly and entered the room.

She seemed shaken, excited, about something.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Murtaugh," Todd smiled, "did you see a ghost?"

"It's making fun of me you are," she answered. "It's not ghosts but Mr. Harton I'm—"

"Confound him!" Todd felt a sudden surge of resentment. "Is he going to plague me every minute of the day? Go downstairs and tell him that I haven't any money and to stop bothering me." He took a quick furious drag on his cigarette, his rage growing. "Tell him," he stormed, "that I dreamed I threw him over the cliff last night, and if he doesn't clear out of here I'll go down and make the dream come true."

"Oh, good God," the landlady gasped, backing away from him, "whatever are ye saying, Mr. Roy?"

"What do you mean?" Todd frowned.

"Mr. Harton ain't downstairs," she whispered, crossing herself quickly, "he's layin' on the rocks at the bottom of the cliff, dead!"

Mrs. Murtaugh was gone, but Todd found that he had suddenly lost his appetite for breakfast. Her announcement had stunned him. But once the shock had passed, something else, sinister and insistent, entered his mind, refusing to be banished. It concerned the dream, and— But no! he told

himself. He was acting like a fool!

A moment later: "It's a coincidence," he told the silence, "nothing more." But it wasn't any use. His nerves were completely out of hand. He'd never been the jittery type. At the University he had dissected cadavers twelve hours a day without thinking twice about it. Now, however, as he held a match to his cigarette, his fingers trembled uncontrollably.

Mechanically, he moved to the door, then, moving with almost frantic haste, he was running down to the steps to the laboratory. He had no impression of conscious volition on his part. It was something deeper than instinct that sent him dashing down those stairs.

When he reached the bottom of the steps he didn't have any concrete idea of what he expected to find, or not to find.

It was quite dark, and as Todd stood in the door of the laboratory, he could see nothing. He reached out and flicked the wall switch, bathing the room in sudden brightness. For a horrible stupefying instant his senses reeled with terror—the Robot was gone!

HOW long he stood frozen in the doorway, he didn't know. It seemed like a small slice of eternity, but was probably no more than several seconds. Then Todd was across the room to the place they had left the Robot, looking swiftly about. Nothing had been disturbed. Everything was the same. But the Robot had vanished.

When Todd returned to his room he walked to the closet and brought out a heavy pair of overshoes. After putting them on, he buckled a long slicker over his suit, pulled a black slouch hat over his eyes, and stepped out of the door. He stood there a moment before descending to the street, a maddening fantastic thought plucking at his brain.

But he refused to consider it until—

A group of morbidly curious villagers were still clustered around the scene of Harton's fall when Todd arrived at the cliff. He nodded to several of the group whom he happened to know. A half dozen of them began to tell him the story, pausing frequently to argue over the details. But Todd wasn't listening now. He was looking. As they poured forth their jumbled versions of the fall, his eyes were sweeping back and forth over the ground.

And Todd saw what he had dreaded to find!

Flat, deep, disc-like prints in the slime. Prints that could have been made by no human agency, prints that were undoubtedly those of the Thought Robot!

"Then it's true," he muttered dazedly to himself. "It's true." And with that thought there came another, searing into his mind like a blazing stab of pain. He was a murderer!

Somehow, in some fashion the Thought Robot had taken direction from him during the night. It had obeyed the wishes of his dream. The Robot had killed Harton. But he, Roy Todd, was the murderer!

Voices around him became a blurred background. At that moment the chilling wind seemed to bite through his thick coat, wrapping its icy fingers around his heart. Todd steeled himself. It was imperative that the curious country-folk should suspect nothing.

"A shame, ain't it?"

He wheeled abruptly, startled by the voice. It was merely a villager, trying to make conversation. "Yes," Todd replied, "it is a shame."

"Them accidents is bound to happen, I allus say," he declared confidentially. Todd muttered something in reply and eased away from him. Accidents! If they had any idea—

Making sure that his observations were unnoticed, he followed the disc-like prints. They were plain enough to any one who knew, leading off in counter direction to the cliff edge, headed toward Bragg's Bog, a wide stretch of swamp mire perhaps a half mile distant from the scene of Harton's death.

The tracks led to the very edge of the bog, then stopped. Todd stood inches deep in the ooze, his mind a dazed and muddled jumble of fear and suspicion, hope and horror, gazing out at the heavy vapor steaming up from the marshes. Somewhere out in that bubbling ooze was their creation, their Thought Robot, hiding cunningly like a hunted criminal and waiting for further commands!

For perhaps fifteen minutes he stood there, staring hopelessly at the forbidding stretches of marshland, clenching and unclenching his fists in an effort to control reason.

Something had to be done, and very swiftly. But what? He had no idea as he headed back for the laboratory. One thing, however, was certain. It was his problem. Michael and Mary must not know of it.

DARKNESS had been over the village for a number of hours, and Todd's ash tray was heaped with innumerable cigarettes. His first horrified struggles with the problem had long since given way to a sort of deadly calm. And the pattern was beginning to form.

There was no escaping the fact that the Thought Robot had responded to his dream desires. But the metal monster had failed to obey his conscious thought projections when Michael and he conducted the tests of the previous evening.

But those had been commands of his conscious mind!

Yet, as he slept, the Robot obeyed dream directions. In sleep Todd knew

the *subconscious* is active, the *subconscious* predominates!*

It was incredible, but there was no other explanation. The receptor mechanism on the Robot had been adjusted too acutely, too finely. It was adjusted so subtly that only the commands of his subconscious were able to register in the electro receptor.

Todd could find no escape from the conclusion, staggering as it was, that the Robot was obeying his subconscious mind!

Somewhere out in the blackness of the night, hidden in the ooze of Bragg's Bog, was a metal monster tuned to carry forth the commands of his subconscious mind—commands he couldn't control!

He was lighting another cigarette when a sudden thought swept over him, numbing his brain with the sheer horror of it.

The Thought Robot had killed Harton at the direction of his subconscious—a deed his conscious mind could never have directed.

Wasn't it possible that his subconscious mind could contemplate further atrocities that his conscious mind would never sanction? The death of Harton meant the elimination of an obstacle, escape mechanism of a dream turned into horrible reality.

In that same dream there had been something concerning Michael and Mary. What was there to prevent his subconscious from wishing the elimina-

tion of Michael Cole? Todd loved Mary Shaw, and Michael stood in the way of his ever fulfilling that love!

Had he dreamed harm to Michael Cole? The thought was absurd. Michael was his closest friend. He would never consciously wish him wrong. But *unconsciously*—?

The thought left Todd trembling. And at that instant he knew that the second subconscious dream wish might have been the death of his friend, that the Robot might already be waiting on that command, emerging from the slime of Bragg's Bog, heading for the inn where Michael was quartered, carrying out a previous subconscious command to kill!

Todd realized he might already be too late. Grabbing his hat and overcoat he dashed out of the room, and a moment later was running through the street in the direction of the inn where Michael lived . . .

WHEN he burst through the door of the inn parlor, Michael and Mary turned instantly. They were sitting directly in front of a glowing fireplace, and he knew his entrance had startled them. Something of what he was thinking, feeling, must have been written on his face, for Michael spoke hurriedly.

"Roy, well I'm damned. What's wrong, fellow? You look like you walked through a graveyard!"

Todd caught his breath, noticing the manner in which Mary was staring at him, then blurted, "Please, Michael. You and Mary must get out of here immediately. We haven't a moment to spare. Something dreadful has happened. I can't explain now. You must trust me—" He broke off sharply. There had been a tremendous impact against the inn door.

But it was the expression on Mary's face that made him whirl.

* This is entirely true. Subconscious thoughts are uncontrollable, and during sleep, when the conscious mind is dormant, the subconscious takes over parts of the brain, such as the memory, and produces dreams, haphazardly set into motion by emotional stimuli, and presents them in disordered fashion. Thus, in a dream, we may desire the death of a loved one, or we may see no barrier to perpetrating a crime we would not countenance while in possession of our conscious mind's thoughts. The barriers, so to speak, do not exist, during sleep, that have been built up by environment, by education, and by that inexplicable thing called conscience.—Ed.

Fear and bewildered horror was stamped in her eyes, and her mouth had opened in a choked effort to scream. For with the second fearsome impact against the door there was a splintering of wood, and a metal fist groped through the torn opening!

"The Robot!" Todd shouted. "We must get out of here immediately. No time to explain!"

The faces of both were bewildered, horrified, uncomprehending. But his voice, the urgency of his commands, must have convinced them that he was not babbling, that catastrophe was in the brute strength of the monster beating the door through.

"Is here an exit in the rear?" Todd demanded.

Michael nodded automatically. "Quick, follow me," he said.

Mary and Todd ran swiftly behind Michael, and in a moment they were in the tiny kitchen of the inn, unfastening the bolts that locked the door. They could hear the efforts of the Robot to smash its way into the room, and the terrifying ripping of wood and iron fastenings lent speed to their movements. In another minute the Robot would have methodically battered its way into the inn!

Then they were out in the clearing behind the place. Wildly, Todd looked around for some sort of refuge to run to. A squat, thick, brick structure was visible about a quarter of a mile distant. It seemed to be their only chance.

Todd had slid an outside bolt across the rear inn door when he stopped outside. But in those brief moments searching for some shelter, the Robot had gained the kitchen and was again smashing against the thin wood that barred its way.

The terrain was rocky and the footing bad. Inside of thirty yards Mary had stumbled. Michael and Todd lifted

her to her feet. There was a bruise on her forehead, and her face, in the brilliance of the moonlight, was chalky white.

Instantly Michael had his arm around her waist. "We can't stop," he cried. Already Todd could hear the effects of the dull sledge-like pounding coming from the rear of the tiny inn.

"Good God, Roy, what—" Michael's sentence was broken off sharply by a scream of terror. They turned swiftly, looking back at the inn and a split-second panorama stamped itself on Todd's mind. The huge metal monster had broken through the door and was emerging into the bright moonlight like some gleaming thing from hell. Beneath the splintered wreckage of the door a figure lay pinned to the ground—the innkeeper!

THE Robot paused, but only for an instant. Mechanically, it shifted its cumbersome bulk in their direction, and then was moving once more.

In unison Michael and Todd slipped an arm around Mary, and began to half-carry, half-propel her over the rocky ground. By the time they had covered a hundred yards Todd's breath was coming in short sobbing gasps, and he could hear Michael's labored breathing. Suddenly Mary twisted her ankle, sagged between them. The unexpected weight almost sent him sprawling.

"I'll carry her," Todd gasped, "for God's sake run ahead and get that door open!"

Michael hesitated only an instant. Then he turned and raced ahead of them. Todd stooped quickly and lifted Mary to his shoulder. A quick glance behind him suddenly flooded his veins with the strength he needed. A scant forty yards away the Robot was staggering with clumsy but incredible swiftness over the uneven ground, its metal

arms outstretched as if in an absurd effort to control balance!

Somehow Todd's legs were moving, somehow he managed to keep footing. His lungs ached horribly as he fought for breath. Perspiration clouded his eyes, and the blocky outlines of the brick sanctuary became a tantalizing nightmarish goal.

Ahead, Todd could hear noises. Michael—pray God he could open the door! Then, beneath his feet, he felt flagstones. Several of them almost sent him sprawling on their smooth damp surface. Fifteen yards ahead lay safety—but did it? Michael was standing before the door of the building, still struggling frantically with the lock!

"Smash it down," Todd shouted, "for God's sake smash it down!"

On the flagstones behind, Todd heard the clatter of the first metallic step. The next few moments were torn from the diary of the Devil. Michael was hurling his weight against the door, but it was unyielding. There was a clattering crash a few feet behind them. Michael spun around at this, stricken. The Robot had slipped face forward on the rocks of the walk, but already was rising, coming forward!

Todd was at the door, beside Michael. In desperation he shifted Mary into Michael's arms, then threw every last atom of strength into a wild lunge at the door. There was the sound of splintering wood as the lock tore through the jamb. Then he sprawled headlong into the darkness of the building.

Michael was right behind him with Mary. Todd sprang to his feet as Michael slammed the door and stumbled past him. Futilely he threw his weight against the door, realizing with sickening horror that his strength was pitiful compared to the driving blows that the Robot would be raining from the other side in another moment.

Then, in the inky blackness, his groping fingers found metal—rusty, semi-corroded metal. In the next second he understood what his fingers gripped—a bolt—evidently long unused—but a precious stopgap for the moment! Frantically he slammed it home into the rusty socket on an unsplintered section of the door jamb.

A fraction of a second later would have been disastrous, for the first thundering blows from the monster's paws smashed against the oaken timbers, and simultaneously Michael found the light switch.

In the sudden brilliance of the room Todd's eyes blinked momentarily, then focused. Even as he looked about desperately for something to barricade the door, he realized where they were. He stared helplessly and frantically at a row of silent steel-hooded turbines bolted to a concrete floor, a huge wall switch several feet from him. There wasn't a movable object in the room. They had taken refuge in the power transmitter outlet for a nearby metropolitan radio station!

MICHAEL was at his side, and a glance showed Todd that he'd placed Mary against a wall on the far side of the room. Then their eyes were fixed on the thick but rusty bolt, the corroded iron standing between them and destruction. Even as they stared in horrified fascination at the bar, the thudding blows from the Robot were having visible effect on it. In another moment it would be snapped!

Fingers dug sharply into his arm. Michael was speaking swiftly, excitedly. "Roy," he said hoarsely, "there's one chance, and it's the only chance. I'll face the Robot. Should be able to damage the mechanism before—" he broke off, then continued. "You take Mary, you'll be able to get away while I—"

Todd hesitated but an instant. Yet in that brief second between realization and action—he knew what he had to do. His jaw hardened, and his fist swung in a vicious arc terminating on the point of Michael's chin. There was grim satisfaction in his eyes as he watched Michael stumble backward and crash to the floor.

And then Todd was shouting to Mary. "Get him back there, behind those turbines, and stay there yourself. Hurry!"

"Wha—" Mary began, terror and confusion in her eyes.

"Do as I say, dammit!" Todd exploded. "For Michael's sake, if not for your own."

Todd wheeled, not waiting to see if the girl had obeyed him, for there wasn't time—not now!

At that instant the door smashed inward under the bludgeoning fists of the robot; and at that instant Todd moved forward to meet the hideous creation of steel and metal that was advancing ominously toward him—obeying but one command, to kill!

Even as the horrible monster swayed awkwardly toward him, Todd's eyes were fixed on its vital breastplate. If—

Todd drove in toward the Robot, launching himself with desperate strength at the thing, his hands groping frantically to seize that plate, to smash the electro-receptor mechanism that was as life to it.

His fingers caught on steel and tore,

and then the outer plate to the receptor was sliding beneath his bleeding hands. For a split second, then, Todd hesitated, realizing in one brief instant that this creature represented everything he had dreamed and hoped and struggled for. In its destruction he knew he would kill a part of himself. And then he drove away the thought, and his fingers closed in upon the vibratory mechanism.

Closed in and tore wildly, savagely. As a beast might rip the heart from a man, Todd was tearing the life from this monster. And even as he did so, an agonized unbearable weight crushed down upon him—the metal arms of the Robot, closing inward in the inexorable embrace to death!

Todd fought the pain and blackness, his fingers continuing to claw frantically at the coiled fibers reposing in the metal heart of the monster. And then, suddenly, a searing flame shot from the metal breastplate. The Robot stiffened convulsively, as if in pain. Todd, face seared and blackened from the blinding flash, felt those arms crush inward in a final, terrible spasm.

The Thought Robot was dying. But even through the all-engulfing mantle of darkness that closed down on him, Roy Todd knew that he was dying also. Dying, that others might live. And dimly, he realized that somehow this was atonement . . . for the havoc . . . wreaked . . . by the creation of his mind . . .

FANTASTIC HOAXES

(Concluded from page 77)

ing my equipment has neglected to tend his business. He put no powder or chemicals in the wagon this morning! I will discharge him at once! I shall have him flogged! Oh, that this should happen today, of all days, when conditions are so favorable for a convincing demonstration! I am sorry, gentlemen, I can do nothing more today. Another time, perhaps."

Strangely, none of the spectators suspected Pucelli of using this unconvincing and rather thread-

bare alibi to extricate himself from impending embarrassment. Instead, he received their universal sympathy and in the reporters' accounts of the episode the inventor was highly praised.

Everywhere Pucelli went his machine met an enthusiastic reception. A flood of orders flowed in an ever-increasing stream back to the foundry. Farmers fought with one another in their frenzy to place orders early and thus insure prompt delivery. Orders for extra-large sizes were encouraged and it was not unusual for Pucelli to supply custom-built hail shooters forty feet high and weighing up to sixty tons.

Soon the factory's capacity had to be doubled

to take care of the huge demand. Competitors appeared but Pucelli had so firmly entrenched himself that competition was negligible. Business men spoke of Pucelli as the savior of the Italian wine industry; insurance companies cut their hail-insurance rates in half to those farmers possessing hail-repelling guns. An official, high in government service, publicly endorsed the device as being "A great boon to the farmer." By 1900—less than a year after Pucelli conceived his nefarious scheme—there were more than 10,000 of his cannon squatting on the fields of Sunny Italy, their cavernous mouths yawning hungrily for the first threat of an approaching hailstorm. Then urgent requests for hail shooters began to filter in from France, England and the Balkans. Exports now became a lucrative branch of the business.

It was perhaps fortunate for Pucelli that the epidemic of hailstorms which had plagued Italy and southern Europe for a decade began to decrease in intensity and in frequency about the time his cannon were achieving their height of popularity. However, this fact was, at the time, generally attributed to the efficacy of his machine rather than to the unpredictable whims of Mother Nature.

Vineyards were still being destroyed by hail in spite of the smoke-belching cannons' loudest efforts. A few dissatisfied customers demanded their money back—and received it, forthwith. Publicity had been the making of Pucelli and he was well aware that the wrong kind would likewise be his undoing. The small number of irate

cannon owners who appeared were easily appeased by the simple process of paying them for their ruined crops, or by convincing them it had been their unskillful operation of the device, and not the gun itself, which was responsible for its failure to disperse hail.

On the whole, it appears that satisfied users were far more numerous than disgruntled ones, judging by the volumes of testimonials Pucelli later produced in court.

Eventually, the Italian government got around to conducting tests and inquiring into the merits of these hail shooters everyone talked about and believed in. The official statement released at the conclusion of the investigation was louder in repercussion than even the mightiest Pucelli cannon.

It said in effect: "These cannon are utterly worthless as hail preventatives, it being an altogether erroneous belief that either explosions or artificially disseminated gas can materially affect atmospheric conditions so as to influence precipitation. In short, dear citizens, you have been the victims of a gigantic hoax."

Pucelli was sued by legions of his victims. With his characteristic audacity he vigorously defended himself, loudly claiming that the government didn't know what it was talking about. But the pressure increased and there was talk of criminal action.

Then one day in 1902, Giovanni Pucelli, the one-time unemployed supersalesman who had hoaxed a nation, dropped completely from sight and never reappeared—at least no trace of him in his true identity has since come to light.

« THE MIRACLE OF U-235 »

JUST what does the discovery of U-235 mean to us, and what will its practical application be? That is a question many of us are asking. Here are a few of the answers.

U-235 is atomic power come true. But strangely, it is nothing mysterious. Its practical application is our old friend, steam power! There you have it. Steam engines will run the world, powered by the magic of U-235 and plain, ordinary water.

Already, practical designs of steam engines have been put into blue-print form, and engineers await only a ready source of U-235 in quantity to build those engines. They are very simple. Each will have a central unit which will carry a small amount of powdered U-235. Each will have a water tank, and an injector which will admit the desired quantity of water. Each will have a "spark plug" in the form of an electron tube, or a photon tube, which will fire these particles into the U-235 to cause the unbalancing of energy that results in its release. Radium, or other radioactive substances, in very minute quantity, will be used for this purpose, shielded by water and lead.

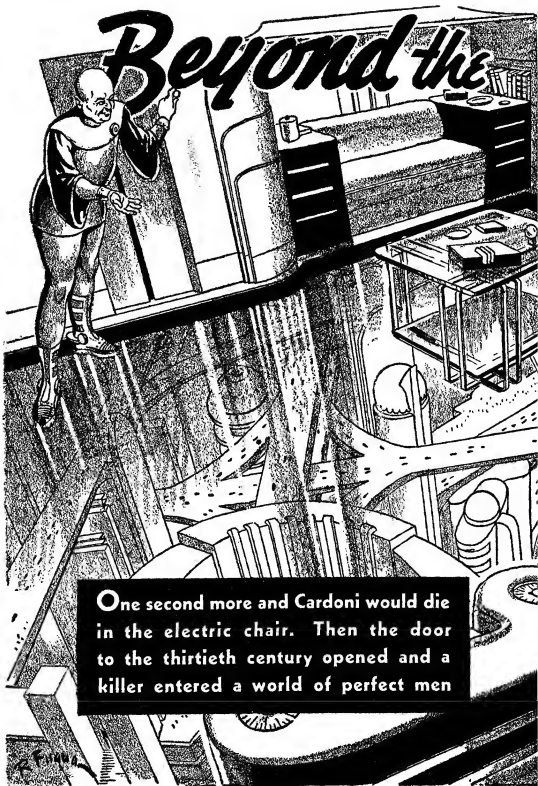
Thus, simply by admitting water instant steam is produced at great speed and pressure.

What can these steam motors do? They will provide a source of power over 50% efficient, and will be small, compact, easily movable. They will move tremendous locomotives at top speed, absolutely under control, for periods limited only by the life of the locomotive.

They will power great flying wings (airplane bodies and present designs will be obsolete), and these will carry not dozens, or hundreds, but thousands of people, as do ocean liners. They will be sturdy, tremendously heavy, and will land on water with scarcely a shudder. In the stratosphere, where most of the flying will be done at speeds that would set the plane on fire at lower altitude, not steam, but gas made from iron can be used, which would result only in an impalpable dust sitting down unnoticed.

Private cars, with permanently installed motors, would be impracticable, since motors would outlive the chassis. These cars, needing no brakes, would be controlled solely by the throttle, and would be positive in action. Tremendous surplus power, for acceleration or deceleration, would be available, with terrific margin of safety.

Further benefits would be endless to mention.



One second more and Cardoni would die in the electric chair. Then the door to the thirtieth century opened and a killer entered a world of perfect men

Time Door

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN



"I KILLED him! Yes, I did it, all right. But he was a rat. He deserved killing. I ain't never killed anyone but a rat."

The words were whispered by the man who sat in the death cell in the big prison. They weren't bitter words of protest, just simple statements of fact. No rancor.

"Rats oughta be killed," repeated the doomed man. "And I guess that's what they think about me, too. They're gonna kill me."

Mike Cardoni, condemned killer, rose from the hard little cot in his bleak gray cell as he heard them coming down the corridor for him. He moved to the bars and stood there with his thick paws on them, waiting. In the cell block, he could hear the other prisoners stirring, moving to the front of their cells to watch the procession that was to come.

Cardoni grinned crookedly. He'd heard it was this way just before the Last Mile. Funny—he was the newest guy in the block, and yet he was going to be the first to take the walk down to the little green door. Most of the others had been able to get stays, or their time was a couple of weeks off. But even twenty-five grand in the paw of the sharpest shyster in the business hadn't been able to get him a stay of execution.

And so here he was, head shaved and trouser legs slit, waiting for them to come and get him. Cardoni felt no re-

sentment, no fear, just a queer sort of curiosity . . .

"I'd be a fine mug to squawk," Cardoni had told old Father Perillo, just that afternoon. "The guy I bumped off had it coming to him. A lousy skunk if I ever seen one."

Father Perillo had been somewhat shocked, his kindly old eyes registering a swift instant of pain. Then Cardoni had tried to explain it as he saw it.

"I wouldn't be here now, Father," Cardoni had said, "if I'd let that copper have it. Could'a' filled the guy with lead and got away clean. But mebbe he's got a wife an' kids, see? Mebbe it'd break them up pretty bad if I bumped him. So the copper nabs me. Mebbe he'll get a promotion outta it, huh?"

But Father Perillo had shaken his head sadly, and Cardoni had seen that the old priest was praying. Cardoni felt rather bad, not being able to put his angle across to the old man. But what the hell. It was something inside of him. Something that got all mixed up when he tried to put it into words. He'd bumped mebbe fifteen guys in his years in the rackets. But they were rats and so what. So Cardoni had sighed, and let the white-haired old priest continue his prayers . . .

Cardoni smiled crookedly again, as the procession stopped in front of his cell and the turnkey opened the door. The warden was there, and Father Perillo, and some other guys whose faces were vaguely familiar to Cardoni.

Cardoni stepped out of the cell and in between the guards.

"Courage, Mike," Father Perillo said, touching him on the arm.

Somehow, Cardoni felt a surge of gratitude at the old priest's words, at his being there. It wasn't because he was scared. He hadn't been scared since he was a kid in Hell's Kitchen

and had pulled his first heist. But it was kind of good to have somebody sticking by you—even if you weren't going to be around for much longer.

Cardoni was still grinning as they began the solemn march down toward the little green door. The other guys in the cell block were quiet for the most part, and most of their faces were strained and white like something was pulling their insides to shreds. Funny, Cardoni thought, why did they have to come to the bars and look out if it made them so damned jittery?

Suddenly, Cardoni wished someone would say something, anything. He turned his head, catching the warden's eye, and winked. The warden was an all right gee; he winked back and that broke the tension. Cardoni suddenly sensed that these men walking beside him, these men taking him down the Last Mile, kind of understood. Kind of knew he wasn't all rat. Maybe it was because he'd given the copper a break. Maybe it was because he never bumped no one but hoods.

It made Cardoni feel better inside. And he threw back his swarthy head and laughed.

"Relax, boys," he chortled, "I'm the only mug whose gonna play cinder!"

But they didn't laugh, and from the cold clammy corridor, the echo of his laughter was the only answer. Then they were at the door, and sweat beaded Cardoni's thick brow for the first time.

The sweat beads were still there, but Cardoni hadn't lost his crooked grin as they strapped him in the chair. Father Perillo was right beside him now, and asking him something he didn't hear. Cardoni nodded, and the old priest bent his white head, his lips moving soundlessly.

After that, they all stepped back, and Cardoni was left quite alone. The black hood that now covered his face pre-

vented his seeing anything else. But he could hear muttering, and something about time. Then, suddenly, Cardoni felt a swimming sensation. Everything wheeled wildly around beneath the blackness of his hood, roaring, roaring—a million miles away.

SOMEONE was helping Cardoni to his feet. The roaring in his ears and mind had subsided, and all that remained was a sensation of giddy instability. He found it difficult to keep his knees from giving way beneath his weight. There were lights all around him, bright lights that burned his eyes and made him shut them tightly in an effort to regain focus. Then a voice was speaking.

"Take all the time you need to adjust yourself, Cardoni," the voice said quietly. "It will take a little time."

Then Cardoni was blinking his eyes against the brightness of the lights and the whiteness of the bare room in which he stood.

"Who in the hell are you?" Cardoni demanded. He was gazing open-mouthed at a ball-headed man about his own age. A bald-headed man whose stature and physical characteristics were similar to his own, short, stocky, and with a swarthy complexion.

The bald-headed man drew his lips tight against his teeth, as if essaying a smile. "My name, although it will mean nothing to you, is Tojar," he said.

But Cardoni's eyes, even as the other spoke, were appraising Tojar's dress. A blue tunic of some material that had the sheen of metal, and shoes of the same composition and color were what he wore. And then Cardoni's attention was drawn to the fellow's eyes. They were blue-gray, cold, and with an intentness that somehow made Cardoni shiver.

As Cardoni looked dazedly around

the strange bright bare room, he remembered his last sensations, remembered where he had been before the blackness of the death hood had blotted out consciousness.

"What the hell is this?" Cardoni rasped. "Where am I? How did I get here? I was—"

Tojar broke in: "You were in your own world, Cardoni, less than five minutes ago according to your standards of time." He drew his lips flat against his teeth again and his cold eyes seemed to glitter. "But now you're in my world."

"This is a gag, and a pretty rotten one," Cardoni snarled. "Damn you, I—"

"Gag?" Tojar interjected. "Gag? Oh, I see, you mean jest. You think this is some mad hoax, eh?" He paused. "I've saved you from death, Cardoni. I think you should be grateful for that much."

Cardoni could only stand there, his mouth open foolishly in an effort to utter words he couldn't find. He had always scoffed at superstition. But minutes ago he had been prepared to die, and now. . . . Was this some afterworld? Cardoni looked again at the other's eyes—clearly, it wasn't Heaven.

"You aren't stupid, Cardoni," Tojar said, his voice still on the same quiet pitch. "Criminal, yes, but not stupid. I am going to explain all this to you. And after a little bit, you will understand." He paused, to try that same icy smile again. "You see, Cardoni, you are no longer in your own world—your world of 1940—you are in another era of time. This is the year 3000, the thirty-first century!"

Cardoni stepped back, as though struck by a blow. His face was a mask of incredulity and then of growing rage. At last he found voice. "I told you," he began, "if this is a gag—"

"Look, if you must be convinced," Tojar said. And as he spoke, his hand went to a button on the wall beside him.

THE floor beneath Cardoni suddenly glowed. Orange, then amber, then pale gray—becoming a transparent sheet of glass. And as Cardoni gazed in stupefied astonishment he found himself looking down on a vast, towering, incredible metropolis of spires and strange labyrinthine roads, layered one upon another and twisting among huge domed buildings!

Tojar touched the button again, and the scene faded away, the floor once more seeming solid beneath them.

Cardoni was breathing hard, his voice was flat as he spoke. "Okay, buddy. You got all the openers. Talk on!"

"Good," Tojar said softly. "I was certain that you weren't stupid. You are beginning to believe me, Cardoni, from that glimpse of the world in which I live. What you saw beneath you was New York. Not New York as your mind conceives it, but New York as it is today, in the thirty-first century. I've brought you into this century, out of your own, and away from the certain death you faced."

Cardoni's voice was still flat. "Why?"

Tojar registered his chrome-steel smile again. "I can use you. Or, I might say, we can use one another. You can do me a favor, and I can return the favor for you."

"The talk is still double," Cardoni said. "Get on to the pitch. If this is all level, what's the play?"

"You've killed fifteen men, Cardoni. To you, and to your world, murder is not unknown. But here, in my century, things are vastly different. No one kills here. No one is able to kill."

Cardoni frowned, and Tojar's icy eyes caught his bewilderment. "This is a different civilization. It is what

might be called a perfected civilization. There is no murder, no slaughter in war, no hatred or greed. For a thousand years our scientists have been conditioning the world, until now, as it is here in the thirty-first century, it has reached an emotionally perfect balance." Tojar shrugged. "Even I am physically unable to kill."

Cardoni's brows knotted in concentration. "So we'll say this is on the level; that you can't, that no guy can. I still ain't got the answer. Where do I come in?"

"I said I was physically unable to kill," Tojar's steely smile was once more prominent. "But I didn't say that I wouldn't wish to kill. I didn't say that there is no one whom I would like to kill. There is a person whose death would fit in perfectly with a plan of mine. I want you to kill this person for me."

"You *want* to bump a guy?" Cardoni said perplexedly. "But you said that no guy can hate or play the graft in this setup. How come you do?"

Tojar's voice was still quite calm, but the expression in his eyes gave Cardoni a sensation of chill. "In this emotionally stabilized world I am, fortunately, a throwback. And fortunately no one knows this but me. My body is so conditioned that I cannot actually commit murder. But my mind has been unaffected by those around me. I have kept this from everyone, waiting my time. And now it is necessary that I kill." Tojar reached into the pocket of his tunic, and his hand came forth holding a gun. Cardoni recognized it instantly as an automatic.

"A rod," Cardoni gasped. "Do you still have those?"

Tojar shook his head. "This weapon is a museum piece. I have others like it in a perfectly preserved collection. Unfortunately, they do me no good.

We have no weapons in this civilization. It has been centuries since we have had."

"Will it work?" Cardoni blurted.

"I said it was perfectly preserved, and with bullets to fit its chamber," Tojar replied softly. He still held the gun in his hand. "It is loaded now."

"And you want me to bump a guy with it," Cardoni broke in. "You want me to use it because no one else in this set-up can?" He paused. "So supposing I do, what then?"

"I will repay the favor," Tojar said, his voice silken steel, "by sending you back to your world in the manner in which I brought you here." His eyes caught Cardoni's uncomprehending frown. "I brought you here by a time device—a machine which took you from your era to mine," he explained.

Cardoni's voice was suddenly harsh. "And you'll send me back that way, huh? Back to the chair!"

TOJAR shook his head. "No, Cardoni, not to the chair. If you do me this favor, I'll send you back *one year before the time you were caught and sentenced to death!* Do you see what that means, Cardoni? You can return to your century a free man. You can see to it then that you don't take the step that led you to the chair! You can see to it that the circumstances which led to your being sentenced to death *will never happen!*"

Cardoni put his thick hand to his face, shaking his head as if to clear it. "This is screwy. Screwy as hell. But I see your pitch, buddy." Suddenly he looked up at Tojar. "How in the hell didja pick me for this job?"

Tojar shrugged. "Chance. When I knew what I wanted, I knew that I would have to take someone capable of murder, used to killing, into this century from the past. A study of case rec-

ords of ancient civilization revealed your record. Such records are kept as oddities now. Your case was recorded, even to the time and date of your death in the electric chair. Through that, I knew I could bring you here—by setting my time device to several seconds before your death—and have something to offer you as inducement to serve me."

Cardoni was shaking his head almost dazedly. "And if you send me back, I won't die?"

"You won't die. You can prevent it."

Cardoni laughed harshly, humorlessly. "And all I was hoping for was a reprieve. Okay, buddy, it's a deal!"

Tojar smiled, those icy eyes boring into Cardoni, and held out the gun. "I knew you'd be the man."

Cardoni took the gun, and the feel of it was familiar in his paw. Then he looked down at his slit trouser legs, prison shoes, and denim shirt. He rubbed his shaved head reflectively.

"I can't go running around in this get-up. It ain't how you people dress," he said. "The only thing you and me got in common is our bald domes." Suddenly he laughed, thinking of the warden and old Father Perillo. Rich, that's what it was—rich! Bump a rat to save yourself from frying for bumping a rat!

Cardoni was still smiling grimly as Tojar brought him a change of dress and gave him his instructions. And when he had gotten everything straight, and Tojar's instructions were set in his mind, Cardoni laughed once more. As he laughed, Tojar said: "And then you can return here—swiftly."

The laughter died in Cardoni as Tojar spoke. For once again those eyes bored into him, making him chill inside. As Cardoni stepped from the room, he thought for an instant of those eyes. Then he realized, they were like a

snake's. Cardoni shivered, then shrugged, closing the door behind him. Ahead lay this strange new world. But the gun in his tunic pocket recalled to him that his mission was neither strange nor new. It would just be the sixteenth time he'd killed a man. . . .

IT was two hours later when Cardoni returned to the bright, bare, white room where Tojar awaited him. Cardoni slammed the door behind him and leaned hard against it. His breath came in sobbing gasps as he stared wordlessly at Tojar.

Tojar had been standing next to a small cabinet in the far corner of the room. Now he turned from it, facing Cardoni, his eyes regarding him carefully, coldly. "You did it?" Tojar asked.

Then Cardoni was talking, as though the words inside him had suddenly broken free of a dam. "You got it across that no guy could bump another. You got across a lotta other stuff about civ'lizashun, stabluzashun, and all like that. I thought I got whatcha meant. But I didn't. I hadn't seen it. I hadn't felt it."

Cardoni seemed to choke for a moment, then he stumbled on. "There was an old guy you wanted me to bump. Well, I found him, like you said I would. But I found something else—something I wasn't looking for. I seen it in the old guy's eyes, just as I let him have it—just as I pumped a slug in his skull, God!"

Cardoni was sobbing now, and his breath tore in his lungs. "Those eyes—the old guy's eyes, they wasn't like yours, or like mine. They was like a kid's—a kid who's been slapped hard acrost the mouth and hurt bad inside! Damn you," Cardoni's voice trembled with harsh rage now, "damn you, he was a right gee! Good, like everyone

else in this set-up. I seen a lot'a' them. They was all good gees. The whole damn set-up is right! It's like—" and Cardoni choked off, unable to find the words he sought.

Tojar's eyes were flat and half-lidded, and the corners of his mouth twitched in satanic amusement. He seemed to be waiting until certain that the outburst was over. Then he spoke.

"You've fulfilled your end of the bargain, I take it. Good. That's all that concerns me. Now, if you can harness your puerile emotions long enough, I'll carry out my part of the agreement. This device here," Tojar pointed to the cabinet in the corner, "is the machine by which I'll send you back to your own time era." And as Tojar spoke, he threw a lever on the side of the cabinet. There was a sudden soft humming, and a light tube across the top of the cabinet glowed to a luminous orange.

The humming from the cabinet was growing in volume. Tojar stepped back a few feet from it, watching, while a faint shadow began to form directly beside it. The shadow appeared dimensional, and was darkening. Darkening until at last it was an eerie void of ebon blackness.

Tojar smiled. "There is your door," he said. "There is—" and suddenly his face went hard. For Cardoni had pulled the automatic from his tunic pocket and was levelling it at Tojar.

"Damn you," Cardoni swore softly. "Damn you."

TOJAR found voice. "Don't be a fool," he hissed. "It won't help you to kill me. You'll never get back if you do. The time device is still set to return you straight to the chair, two seconds before the juice was to be thrown. I'm the only one who can regulate it so that you'll return to a year

before that time. Put down that gun!" His voice had risen as he spoke, and his last words were shrill, almost hysterical.

Cardoni held the gun unwaveringly. Hate filled his eyes and there was loathing in his voice. "This whole damned world of yours is right," he said. "But you ain't. I never killed no one but rats until a little while ago. Now I think I'll get back to rats."

Tojar's face was white, and instinctively he backed away as Cardoni moved forward. His lips trembled as he tried uselessly to form words. His face was suddenly bathed in sweat. Cardoni took another step forward. Tojar backed once more. Backed once more, and screamed wildly. For even as an infinite expression of horror froze in his cold eyes—Tojar was disappearing into the inky void of the Time Door!

And then Cardoni's big body was torn by wild, sobbing laughter. Tojar was gone, and only the black shadow and the cabinet remained. Tojar was gone—and Cardoni knew that that unwitting backward step had sent him hurtling down through time—to the certain death that waited in the chair!

Cardoni raised his gun. Raised his gun and sent one shot blasting into the glowing orange light tube on the top of the cabinet. The tube burst in a blast of flame and tinkle of glass, and the

shadow beside the cabinet disappeared.

Now Cardoni stood there dazedly, the gun still in his hand, while everything turned crazily around in his brain. For here in this strange world into which he had been unwillingly thrust, he had found his answer. The answer—materializing all the emotions that Cardoni would never be able to phrase. The emotions that were deep inside him, mixed, and never to be voiced.

He realized this even as he knew he would never fit into this pattern of time. The gun in his hand, the blood on his soul, had forever alienated him from this paradise of peace and harmony. The gulf that separated him from this, was more than one of time.

Quite suddenly, he was sobbing no longer. He stared at the wreckage of the cabinet, a curious smile twisting the corners of his mouth. Then he muttered: "If the warden and old Father Perillo could see me now. Jeeze it's rich—rich!" Cardoni threw back his head, laughing wildly. At last he stopped, whispering one sentence.

"Except for one right gee, I killed nobody but rats—and this last won't be no exception."

There was a swift, aching second in which something wrenched unbearably at Cardoni's heart. Then, deliberately, he raised the automatic to his temple and fired. . . .

An Author's "True" Fantastic Adventure

RALPH MILNE FARLEY is perhaps one of the most beloved writers of fantasy fiction, and he was a friend and collaborator of the great Stanley G. Weinbaum, perhaps the greatest of them all, had he lived to accomplish what he planned. And a story Farley loves to tell concerns a "message" from his dead friend.

"I was working late," says Farley. "It was dark in my study, except for the desk lamp, and the white sheets of paper under it; and in my sight beyond the desk were only vague shadows. I had ceased writing, for I had come to a passage in the story that eluded me. Strive as I would,

I could not solve the problem. What could I do?

"Almost in despair, I laid down my pen and leaned back. And then, before my startled eyes, a form took shape. In a moment the figure of Stanley Weinbaum stood behind the desk.

"I sat frozen, not daring to move, lest the vision, figment of my strained vision or not, were to vanish. Then my visitor spoke; and in calm, sure tones, dictated the passage that had eluded me, in the brilliant way that had been his wont in life. I wrote furiously, and when I looked up, I was alone. Was it *really* a vision? I prefer to think not."

ADOPTED SON

WILBUR WUNCH trudged wearily homeward through the wet, dismal night. His shoes squished protestingly at each tired step and his narrow shoulders were hunched against the penetrating dampness.

It was gloomy, depressing weather and its lowering gloom settled like a sombre pall over Wilbur's slightly frayed soul.

He looked up at the rolling, leaden sky and thought of his cheerless spouse, Wilhimena. He thought of her first because there was something in the ominous banks of dull, gray clouds that reminded him of Wilhimena's grim, frowning visage and secondly because the heavens always reminded him of Wilhimena's favorite hobby—astrology.

Astrology! How he hated even the word.

It was his wife's second favorite topic. Her first was a sort of continuous rambling recrimination against Wilbur for not making more money. When she was not berating him for his lack of money-making ability she was casting horoscopes, visiting astrologists and mooning over the stars and their orbits.

Wilbur sighed. For an envious moment he thought wistfully of the delights of a bachelor existence.

His musings centered on one Joe Bloddget, an unmarried young devil

with a low-slung car, a bachelor apartment and hosts of friends.

Joe Bloddget had a much better job than himself. He had a much better existence. He had much more fun. He enjoyed life to the full and did whatever he wanted to do.

It wasn't fair, he thought darkly, that one human being should be so happy and another human being be so miserable. He could be like Joe Bloddget if—he derailed that particular train of thought with a jerk and hurried on homeward.

Wilhimena would be waiting for him to peel the potatoes for supper and if he wasn't there on the dot there'd be an eruption that would make Vesuvius pale into insignificance. With a frantic glance at his watch he broke into a trot . . .

HE stumbled up the steps of his modest bungalow with twenty seconds to spare. He let himself in quietly but before he could take off his damp brown overcoat or kick off his muddy rubbers his wife's shrill voice cut through the stillness of the house like a knife.

"Wilbur! Is that you?"

She asked or rather bawled the same question every night. Once Wilbur had answered: "No, it's Santa Claus!" but he had never tried it again.

He answered now: "Yes, my dear," as he shrugged out of his coat and scuffed off his rubbers with a resigned, hangdog listlessness.

OF THE STARS



"Now I will make my last wish!" said Wilhimena. "I wish . . ."

by William P. McGivern

ONLY once in a million years could it have happened. But it happened now to Wilbur Wunch—and he became the luckiest man ever born!

"Wilbur," his wife's voice conveyed a note of suspicious cordiality, "come into the front room at once. There's someone here I'm just *dying* to have you meet."

Wilbur struggled against a sputtering, growing feeling of outrage. It was supper time but that didn't bother Wilhimena, oh no. *Her* friends could lounge around the house from morning till night and that was just fine. *He* didn't count. *His* friends were treated as if they had the mange.

"Coming, my dear," he said resignedly.

He forced a weak smile over his features and then he marched through the hall into the front room and into the presence of his wife and another sour-looking female who squatted complacently in his lounging chair.

His wife stood up and he wondered for the four-hundred-fifty-fifth time what he had ever seen in her. She was a tall thin creature with a strong hatchet face that seemed to be waiting to chop at something. Her black hair was pulled into a tight knot at the back of her leathery neck and her gray lips were usually pressed tightly together. Now they were parted slightly in a poor facsimile of a welcoming smile.

"Wilbur," she said sharply, "I want you to meet Miss Elvira Chittling. Miss Chittling, my husband."

Wilbur nodded and tried to look as if it were a great privilege. Miss Chittling was a huge, lumpy woman with a dull, bovine expression and coarse yellow hair that drooped discouragingly about her sloping shoulders.

She was looking at him appraisingly, he noticed.

"What house?" she asked suddenly.

"H-house," floundered Wilbur, "what do you mean?"

"I mean what house were you influenced by," she repeated in a slightly

exasperated voice. "What stellar combinations guide your destiny? Sagittarius, Capricorn, Uranus—"

"I'm sorry, Elvira," his wife was acidly apologetic, "Mr. Wunch knows nothing of astrology. He refused to take lessons with me, refused to avail himself of the guidance of the stars—and look at him! Barely able to keep soul and body together. And as for me," she stared heavenward like a martyr, "only *they* know what I've been through."

Wilbur sighed despairingly. "Who are *they*?" he asked.

"The stars," his wife said, in the voice of one who has learned not to look for intelligence in her listeners, "the stars that guide our destiny know the suffering I've seen."

She bowed her head and Miss Chittling bowed her head and Wilbur thought forlornly of his delayed supper.

"Will you excuse me," he said timidly, "you two girls probably have some er-er-stars to talk over so I'll just step—"

"Mr. Wunch," the lumpy Miss Chittling's voice disorganized his retreat, "have you ever been cast?"

"You mean thrown?" Wilbur offered blankly.

"I mean," Miss Chittling gathered volume and dignity, "have you ever had your horoscope cast?"

"Well, no," Wilbur admitted guiltily.

Miss Chittling surveyed him through narrowed lids and then beckoned imperatively. "Come here," she said softly. "Your time has come. The time for the stars to make known to you their will and desires has arrived. Sit beside me."

"But," Wilbur protested feelingly, "I don't care what the stars have in store for me. I want my supper."

"*Wilbur!*"

Wilbur winced at the lash of his

wife's tone. When her voice developed that particular edge it was no time to quibble.

"All right," he said wearily. With a last wistful look in the direction of the kitchen he seated himself before the hefty figure of Miss Chittling.

SHE was opening a leather portfolio and pulling out a number of sheets of heavy paper with intricate designs and circles drawn upon them. Wilbur noticed a clock-wise arrangement on the largest sheet of paper. It was criss-crossed by a half-dozen lines and in each division of the circle there was the picture of some animal. Bulls, goats and other animals that Wilbur couldn't get a good look at.

"Astrology," he mumbled.

He noticed that his wife and Miss Chittling looked up rather sharply at him so he laughed weakly. "Heh, heh. Astrology, great stuff. Fine hobby."

"Astrology," Miss Chittling informed him sternly, "is no hobby.* Mr. Wunch, I want you to answer some questions for me. First the date of your birth."

Wilbur told her. He also confided rather reluctantly a number of other things which Miss Chittling digested in sombre silence.

"Hmmm," she pursed her lips and frowned moodily, "very interesting, very interesting." Her fingers ran up and down the various charts like plump rabbits chasing one another, finally stopped in one of the divisions of the

largest circle. The one with animals, Wilbur noticed.

Miss Chittling then proceeded to take down some figures on a piece of scratch paper, then closed her eyes and leaned back in the chair.

Wilbur watched her furtively. Her lips were moving, and he could hear her breath whistling through her uneven teeth. She seemed to be mumbling some strange words that made no sense at all to Wilbur. It might be, Wilbur thought worriedly, that there was something to this astrology business after all. Maybe—

"Incredible!" Miss Chittling's shout blasted through his furtive thoughts.

"It's incredible, simply incredible," Miss Chittling repeated again with less volume but considerably more feeling. "In all my years of astrological research I have never encountered a more remarkable phenomenon."

"Elvira," Wilhimena Wunch snapped out the word, "what is it? What is so remarkable about Wilbur's horoscope?"

Wilbur squirmed uneasily. Maybe he had been tried and found wanting by some unfriendly star.

"It is one of those things," Miss Chittling informed the world in general and Wilhimena Wunch in particular, "that occurs but once in millions of years."

She turned to Wilbur. "You are very fortunate, Mr. Wunch, that you have the benefit of this information."

"Am I?" Wilbur asked unenthusiastically.

"Mr. Wunch," Miss Chittling said, "tomorrow amazing things are in store for you. A galaxy of stellar bodies have centered their influence on you and you will be most susceptible to their effect tomorrow as the sun sets."

Wilbur tried to appear properly impressed. "Gosh," he said. This sounded rather inadequate so he added, "Gee."

* Astrology is not regarded generally as a true science, but as a pseudo science. Many people believe the stars do have an influence on events, and science itself does not deny that this may be the case. Certainly powerful radiations are emanated by all super-heated bodies, such as the stars are, and conceivably, they may effect our bodies and minds, and in that manner, events. However, cold bodies, like the planets, on which astrology is largely based, cannot affect us that way, and the powers attributed to them are largely mythical, and not to be confused with the science of astronomy.—Ed.

"IT is not a light matter," Miss Chittling informed him sternly. "You must plan now to take advantage of the friendly influence of these myriad stars that have, for some reason, interested themselves in your welfare."

"That right nice of them," Wilbur said politely, "but—"

"Oh, Elvira!" his wife cried, "are things really that favorable?"

"I have said," Miss Chittling replied majestically, "that I have never seen anything like it."

"Well," Wilbur said cautiously, "this has been a lot of fun but I'm kind of hungry now so I think—"

"You stupid, miserable fool," his wife blazed at him. "Is that all you can think about? Don't you realize your own good fortune?"

That was easy. "No," said Wilbur, "I don't."

Miss Chittling harrumphed herself into the conversation.

"I will try and explain it to you, Mr. Wunch. When one star's friendly influence is directed toward a person that person is considered to be extremely fortunate or lucky. That is no doubt the origin of the expression 'born under a lucky star'. But," Miss Chittling paused to sniff, "there is no such thing as luck, merely stellar intervention in human affairs. But in your case, Mr. Wunch, not one, but millions of stars are interceding in your behalf."

"What for?" Wilbur asked breathlessly.

"That, I cannot answer," Miss Chittling replied with rare modesty, "but I do know, Wilbur Wunch, that tomorrow will be a miraculously fortunate day in your life."

"That's fine—"

"If," Miss Chittling rumbled imper turbably on, "you know how to take advantage of your good fortune."

"You will help him, won't you?" Wil-

himena spoke imploringly, "you will be good enough to help him won't you, Elvira?"

Wilbur scratched his head. "I don't understand," he said bewilderedly. "If I'm going to be so lucky tomorrow what I need any help for?"

Miss Chittling smiled. "Silly boy," she murmured, "you will be lucky tomorrow, yes. But you need someone to coordinate and concentrate the diffused star force so that the total effect of its intercession will be felt. I can do this. I can, by special observation and interpretation, combine the loose threads of stellar influence so that your good fortune will be received in one lump, so to speak."

"How?" asked Wilbur.

"By meteor study," Miss Chittling declared impressively. "I study the relation of meteorites to star force to human destiny."

Wilbur swallowed. "T—that's logical enough," he offered timorously.

Miss Chittling delved into the portfolio again and came up with a leather bag. The contents she emptied into her lap.

WILBUR saw that they were stones and small rock fragments of various sizes, shapes and hues. Miss Chittling pawed through them and finally picked out three pieces of slate gray rock about the size of ice cubes.

"What are those?" Wilbur asked uncertainly.

"Meteor fragments," Miss Chittling explained briefly. She seemed too busy now to talk any further. She had drawn forth from the portfolio a queer contraption of steel and wires that looked somewhat like a combination of a slide rule and grocery scale. Into a compartment she dropped a meteor fragment and then she moved an indicator along a calibrated bar until it seemed

to catch in a tiny notch. Then she removed the meteor fragment from the compartment and inserted the remaining two.

"I think this is it," she said, spacing her words very carefully. "I think this is it."

"Oh, Elvira," Wilhimena Wunch said breathlessly, "I hope you've found it." In her excitement Wilhimena's face flushed red and white like a barber pole. Her predatory nose was hooked forward like a sharp claw and her thin chest rose and fell like a bellows.

Miss Chittling suddenly slumped against the back of her chair and closed her eyes. "It is over," she murmured throatily. "I have succeeded. These meteor fragments possess the correct equation to balance the star forces with human destinies. Each of these fragments," she raised the stones dramatically above her head, "are tuned to the galaxy of stars that are about to determine your fate. As the sun sets tomorrow your stars will be in the ascendancy. Make known your desires then and they will be granted. Each stone represents an accumulation of good fortune and for each stone a wish can be granted."

"You mean," Wilbur said unbelievably, "because of the stones and the stars and everything my wishes will be granted tomorrow?"

Miss Chittling nodded. She seemed to be spent from her exertions.

"Oh, that's simply wonderful," Wilhimena cried in her crow-like voice. "Think of it! Riches, money, jewels—everything I've always wanted."

The enthusiasm was contagious. "Gee," Wilbur said happily, "I can get that fishing rod I've always wanted."

"Fishing rod!" Wilhimena's voice was close to the cracking point. "That's all you can think of. I'll decide what we're going to get from your wishes and

don't you forget it."

Wilbur felt a shivery premonition crawl up his spine. Wilhimena, nagging and fretful, was bad enough, but Wilhimena, grasping and greedy, would be impossible. But the faint fires of revolt had long ago been stamped out in Wilbur's soul.

"Yes, my dear," he replied meekly.

Miss Chittling's plump hand fluttered weakly. "Six dollars please," she said, in a voice just above a whisper.

"Pay her," hissed Wilhimena.

Wilbur's hand automatically dug into his pocket but his soul writhed with injustice. He had six dollars—just six dollars—saved aside for the entrance fee in his bowling league. No money, no bowling!

He laid the money in Miss Chittling's pink palm and watched the fingers close over it like the leaves of some flesh-eating plant.

"Thank you for the donation," she murmured weakly. "Now I must go. I must rest, rest."

She handed the three stones to Wilbur and climbed heavily to her feet. "Use your good fortune wisely," she said as she started for the door.

Wilbur watched her leave, feeling like the man who bought the Brooklyn bridge at a "sacrifice price." So absorbed was he that he didn't feel the tug on his sleeve until it was repeated with sufficient force to jerk him halfway around.

His wife faced him. Her cold, hard features were stamped in a mask of greed and triumph. "Stop wool gathering, you fool," she snapped, "and give me those meteor fragments."

I SHOULD really have gone to work today," Wilbur Wunch said plaintively the next afternoon. "I've never missed a day before. They'll—"

"Oh, shut up, you miserable little

worm," Wilhimena stormed wrathfully. She was pacing nervously up and down the length of the living room casting impatient glances at the bright afternoon sun.

"Can't you think of anything but that precious office?" she snapped viciously. "Can't you think about me? You've never given me the things I deserved. Money, jewels, position! Other women have them, but not Wilbur Wunch's wife. I've slaved and suffered and scrimped through the years and now that you have the chance to do something for me you worry about the office."

She paused and glanced down at the three stone fragments in her hand. "These will give me the things I've always craved. You couldn't do it and now that you've got the opportunity you'd think that you'd be happy to make amends."

Wilbur Wunch sighed. Wilhimena had been particularly unbearable since the astrologist had predicted that his three wishes would come true. All she had talked about had been the money, the jewels, the servants that she expected. She had made him stay home from work that day to be on hand at sunset, the appointed hour. Wilbur had the very definite suspicion that life would be far from pleasant if Wilhimena's desires were gratified.

The sun, he noticed, was dropping into the horizon, a flaming red ball on the edge of the world. Wilhimena turned to him, her thin narrow features set rigidly.

"It's time," she said. "I'll tell you what to wish."

Wilbur squirmed uncomfortably. He didn't like the set-up. He felt foolish. If Wilhimena was so interested and so greedy why shouldn't she be the one to wish?

"All right," he said petulantly, "but

I don't see why I had to get lucky all at once. It's upset my whole day. I'd be a lot happier if I didn't have anything to do with this."

"Don't worry," Wilhimena snapped acidly, "you aren't going to have much to do with this affair. I'm going to arrange that."

"Why—why, what do you mean?" faltered Wilbur.

"Just this," Wilhimena faced him, her hands resting belligerently on her angular hips. "It's time for you to wish now. The sun is going down. And you're going to wish just what I tell you. Your first wish will be to wish that I had the wishing power for the remaining two stones. Do you understand me?"

"Why sure," Wilbur said, "you want the power to make the wishes. That's all right with me because I never wanted it anyway. That astrologer said I was going to be real happy and lucky today but I never felt worse in my life. So you're welcome to it. I wish that you had the power to make the two remaining wishes. There! Does that make you feel any better?"

"I'll know in a little while," Wilhimena cried excitedly. She squared her narrow shoulders and threw back her head. "I wish I had one million dollars," she said loudly.

Wilbur sighed discouragedly. If Wilhimena got her wish it would be a calamity. She would turn into an unbearable, arrogant over-proud snob. He shuddered contemplating it. What his own life would be he hardly dared think about. In the middle of these unpleasant thoughts the doorbell rang.

WILHIMENA answered it and an instant later he heard a shrill, hysterical shriek sounding through the house. He started for the front of the house but he met Wilhimena scurrying

wildly toward him. Her thin face was flushed with fanatical exultance.

"It worked," she screamed, "it worked."

"What did?" he asked her dazedly. For the first time he noticed the letter she was clutching in her hands.

"The stars," she cried, "the stars have done it. My wish has been granted. A distant relative of mine died and left me his fortune. It amounts to just exactly one million dollars. I'm rich, rich, d'y'hear? rich." She danced around the room, hugging the letter to her bosom, crying and screaming frantically.

Wilbur watched her in silence. It was worse than he had thought it would be. And that was saying a lot. He watched her calm down, watched the greedy cunning creep into her face.

"I suppose," she said quickly, "that you think you have some claim on this money. I can see it in your face. You think because you gave me the wishes you deserve half of the money. Well you don't, do you hear me? You don't. It's mine and I intend to keep every cent of it for myself."

Wilbur knew his wife too well to be surprised by her selfishness. He only wondered gloomily about the black, unenviable future that stretched before him. He thought of Joe Bloddget and sighed wistfully.

"And don't forget," Wilhimena thrust herself into his pleasant dreams, "I still have another wish." She glared at him scornfully and Wilbur would have sworn that her eyes actually glittered like they're reported doing in fiction.

"I've made up my mind," she said deliberately, "but before I make my wish there are a few things I want to tell you. First I want to tell you how much I despise you. How much your beaten, insignificant, frightened little mind disgusts me. Then I want to tell

you that I've laughed at you for years and I've enjoyed brow-beating you because I knew you never had the courage to talk back. You're a despicable, revolting little worm, Wilbur Wunch, and I had to tell you that before I left you for good."

"Leave me?" Wilbur gasped.

"Do you think I'm fool enough to stay now that I have money?" Wilhimena demanded ruthlessly. "I've got the money I need and here's my last wish." She stood before him a picture of incarnate rage and triumph—thin, bitter, mean, cruel and scornful.

"I wish," she said spitefully, "that I'd never met you, Wilbur Wunch."

Wilbur opened his mouth, but before he could speak a blinding flash shot through the room and then all hell seemed to explode in his face.

Before everything went black he had a kaleidoscopic image of the room whirling dizzily, Wilhimena's lean features a mask of fright and amazement, and then the entire flashing picture merged into reeling fathomless blackness . . .

WILBUR WUNCH had braced himself against the incredible, blinding shock that had assailed him. Braced himself, while bunching his hands into tight knots. But then, miraculously, the roaring had faded, the room seemed to be regaining balance. And Wilbur opened his eyes.

Everything was quiet, everything was beautiful, but—the realization struck him with the suddenness and force of blackjack in a dark alley—*everything was totally changed!*

Wilbur Wunch was no longer in the modest living room of his home! He was in a strange, luxurious apartment.

Dazedly, semi-hysterically, he looked wildly about. A thousand fears bat-

(Concluded on page 135)



Secret of the **STONE DOLL**

BY DON WILCOX

Who was the madman of the island? What was the enigma of the stone doll? Why must I make a pilgrimage into a weird hell to earn Looma's love?

YOU may say that I was a romantic fool for staying on the island of Traysomia. But you never saw Looma.

You may say that I was a madcap to think that I could cast my lot with the natives and learn to live as they lived. You may say that I was overwhelmed by passions that no man with mature sober judgment would entertain—passions that were sure to bring my world crashing down to ruin.

Again I answer—you never saw Looma.

Had your eyes beheld her, as mine did, on that night of the Traysomian funeral, you too might have cast your cool judgments to the winds and allowed your party of seafarers to sail on without you. Can any man weigh his reasons like so many ounces of silver and predict what he would do under strange circumstances?

My eyes beheld Looma. She was young—she could hardly have been more than seventeen. She was beautiful—never have I seen a girl whose beauty was so enthralling.

I stayed realizing that I was probably the only American on the island. I realized that it might be years before another ship from the civilized world came this way. My ship would not return

this way. It was a ship of amateur explorers, casting about over the vast tropical Pacific for lost peoples and forgotten islands. By mere chance the party had come upon the island of Traysomia.

After a few hours of visiting, my companions had rowed back at sunset



An old, old man, clutching a stone doll and swishing a heavy sabre in the grass

to our ship, which lay a mile or two beyond the Traysomian beach. I had stayed. The charm of the Traysomians had captivated me from the first. Then the preparations for an elaborate tribal funeral had engaged my attention. So I had instructed my companions to have the ship wait for me and I would swim out later.

It was the funeral for an old Traysomian woman. I later learned that she had been the wise old woman of the tribe for many years. It was plain that all the people had great affection for her.

Even the Traysomian outcasts, who dwelt across the Lakawog river, gathered in little groups close to the river's edge to pay tribute.

Fires burned at each end of the crude wooden coffin. Red sparks rose into the black midnight sky. The solemn faces of the tribesmen, circled around the fires, glowed darkly.

I sat in the outer circle. A young native whispered to me from time to time, trying in his friendly way to explain the ceremony to me. Many of his words were almost perfect English. Although my companions and I had been unable to trace the racial ancestry of these golden-skinned primitives, obviously their paths had crossed with those of English-speaking peoples.

Through the long night we sat there on the mile-wide beach. To one side of us was the mouth of the Lakawog river, with its little groups of outcasts huddled by their own fires on the farther bank. Around us was the Traysomian village. Its neat little bamboo cottages tucked in among the midnight blackness of the forest flickered with little grilles of reflected light whenever our fires blazed high.

From time to time certain native men would add small bundles of *fulgor* twigs to the flaming heaps. Gradually the

rude coffin and the corpse within it burned away.

"The wind is right," the friendly Traysomian whispered to me. He indicated that the smokes were blowing toward the center of the island. He made certain explanations of why this was right, but his talk went outside the bounds of my vocabulary. Besides, by this time my eyes had fallen upon the lovely girl.

SUCH a strange charm came over me.

I can scarcely describe it. Above the low half-muffled noises of the burning twigs I could hear the voices of the women—priestesses, as I later learned—who made up the inner circle around the fires. They kept up a long musical murmur—and such dreamy voices! On and on these soft-spoken recitations continued, seeming to blend with the magic of the tropical night.

Gradually most of the tribesmen closed their eyes.

But the girl I watched showed no signs of drowsiness.

Her dark liquid eyes seemed to be as alert as the rising sparks that she watched. She scarcely moved, and yet she appeared to be on the verge of action, like a bird caught by a camera as it takes to wing. The flickering light was full on her uptilted face and throat. The wind played through the shower of blue-black hair that draped her shoulder. She was clothed in a simple native dress that clung closely about her full breasts and her lithe shapely body.

Now, as one by one the natives fell asleep, the girl's manner became all the more alert. She rose to her feet slowly, almost stealthily. Her eyes roved over the sleeping throng. For an instant I felt her gaze linger upon me. Her look of suspicion was disturbing. I knew instinctively that, whatever her plan, it was not a part of the regular funeral

ritual. I pretended to fall asleep.

The girl hurried away. She ran. She was out of sight. She had disappeared in the direction of the silent glassy sea.

The faintest gray of dawn was upon the water's surface. I could make out a dim outline of my ship on the right horizon. Far to the left I thought I could see traces of waves out into the mirror-smooth surface—the wake of a canoe, perhaps. Or a swimmer.

I ran to the water's edge. Half a mile out in the vast expanse of gray the girl was swimming. Her course pointed to nothing but the endless ocean. There was no time to look for a boat. I shook out of my surplus clothes and plunged.

It must have been all of an hour later, judging by the rising sun, that I struggled back toward shore dragging the half-drowned beautiful girl with me.

Several Traysomians were on the bank by this time, chattering excitedly. They sent a canoe out to meet us.

"Looma! Looma!" the men in the canoe cried. They drew her in. They made me get in also. We rowed back to shore. All the way Looma was silent. And to my surprise the men did not demand any explanations. I could not understand this at the time, for I had not yet heard of "vling-gaff", the taboo. It seemed to me that the girl's strange conduct would surely get her into a tangle.

"Looma! Looma!" the women called excitedly as soon as we were within hearing. "You are alive, Looma!"

The canoe drew up to the beach. Looma took a deep breath as if summoning her energies. She rose and stepped forth gracefully.

"I have come back," she said. Those simple low-spoken words were all. She brushed the water from her hair and eyelashes, smiled and walked away.

A FEW girls followed after her to escort her to her home. Most of the

crowd stood gazing as if baffled by what had happened. One nervous impetuous young native boy came running up and blurted his curiosity aloud.

"What made her do it? Did she want to drown herself?"

"Vling-gaff!"

A dozen persons must have gasped the word at once. The effect was like an electric bolt. Fright shot through the boy's face. He cupped his hands over his mouth. He bowed his head. Slowly he walked away.

The people stood almost like statues, watching the retreating figure. Not until the boy had reached the mouth of the Lakawog river, plunged in, and swum across to the other side to join the outcasts did these people relax.

This boy, as I later learned, had impulsively crashed through the strictest Traysomian taboo. His tongue-slip had implied that Looma had been afraid of something and had sought to escape that something by drowning herself. Such a charge cannot be uttered aloud in Traysomia. The taboo of vling-gaff bans all mention of fear or weakness or defeat.

"But the girl's own actions—" I protested, when a friendly Traysomian tried to explain this matter to me, "—the fact that she was deliberately swimming to her death—doesn't that prove that she—"

"Vling-gaff!"

The friend cut me off so sharply that I never again tried to argue the matter. And gradually I saw that this taboo was a wonderfully effective scheme.

In fact, I bumped into the thing again that very day. The instance was so slight as to scarcely deserve attention; nevertheless it illustrates how all-inclusive this silence taboo is.

I had eaten something that did not agree with me. I started to tell the native who had served my meal that my

stomach wasn't equal to the demands of these exotic native foods. On the instant he had replied, "Vling-gaff!"

Very well, I said to myself, *vling-gaff!* After all, why should I admit this weakness? Henceforth I would follow the footsteps of the Traysomians and enshroud my failures, small or great, in silence.

Again, I felt a growing warmth for the taboo when I learned that all those outcasts who had taken up their abodes on the other side of the mouth of the river had gone there voluntarily, and that they would voluntarily return when they felt that the shame of their broken silence had worn off. The boy who had blurted the words about Looma swam back to the village side of the river, I recall, some ten or twelve days later.

For two days my ship waited for me, sending a boat for me periodically. By this time I had been completely captivated by the charm of these peaceful primitive people and had decided to stay. My seafaring companions would not accept my decision. I commanded them to sail on. They insisted that they would wait a few more hours.

"We expect favorable winds by afternoon," they warned me, on the third morning of my stay.

"Take advantage of them, by all means," I replied.

"If you change your mind, signal us with a white flag. Otherwise, we'll take you at your word." They rowed back to the ship.

I BREATHED deeply of the highly scented tropical air. I seemed to have fallen into the life of a prince. The Traysomians had established me in a luxurious bamboo house with ornamental furnishings. The neighboring families brought me foods. One by one, each of the older and more important men and women of the tribe came to

me and expressed gratitude for my rescue of Looma.

A very dear girl was Looma, they said. Looma was a girl born to a destiny. The tribe was rich, indeed, to have such a girl as Looma.

To me, all these extravagant comments were no more than fair and honest appreciation of Looma. Never, of course, was any mention made of her having voluntarily embarked upon an endless swim.

"We welcome you to live with us as long as the seasons come and go," one of the leading matriarchs of the village told me. This, I realized, was official. It was the elderly women, not the men, who governed this society.

"You shall be one of us, if you will so honor us," said another influential tribeswoman. "Perhaps you will marry among us."

I returned the matriarch's courteous bow, and she turned and walked away. My eyes swept across the wide panorama. A soft breeze swayed the lacy tropical ferns along the line that curved from the forest-tops down to the beach. Peaceful golden-skinned Traysomians played on that beach. Their dark hair fluffed in the rising winds. Far out on the waters my ship was setting sail.

I could see someone on the bow waving a signal flag.

For a moment a little flurry of panic shot through me. I felt a sharp impulse to answer that signal. I started to rise—

Then I dropped back into the comfortable lounge-chair within the shade of the tropical foliage that graced my front porch. Looma was coming toward me.

A faint smile was on the beautiful girl's lips. She sauntered into my presence with the easy grace of self-confidence. I had not seen her, I was poignantly aware, since the morning of her swim. I had never talked with her.

And yet she approached me as if she were an old friend.

In her hand she carried a comb of highly polished shell.

"I bring you a gift," she said softly. Then, as if to illustrate the purpose of the article, she began to comb my hair. I was entertained, to say the least, by her efforts to untangle my matted locks. But before she got through I began to suspect there were not so many tangles as she was pretending.

My ship sailed out of sight. I smiled. The words of one of the old matriarchs echoed in my mind. "You shall be one of us . . . Perhaps you shall marry among us."

CHAPTER II

Traysomian Wedding

THE day before Looma's and my wedding, her brother took me on a long hike into the interior of the island. He showed me the well-beaten paths that cut through this semi-jungle area. Here and there we came upon fellow tribesmen who were gathering fruit or roots.

The well-beaten trails, Looma's brother explained, circled the entire island. He made a rough model out of earth, and from his diagrams I caught the impression that the known portions of the island circled around a mountainous interior something like a hat brim around the crown of a hat.

Eventually we stopped and rested on a low stone wall. I started to step across but Looma's brother pulled me back.

"Not today," he said.

"Why?"

"Because it isn't customary."

I gazed at the wall with some curiosity. It stood about a foot high. The Traysomians had built it of loose stones, evidently many generations before, for

it was in bad repair. It appeared to be endless, extending to the left and right as far as I could see, disappearing in distant shadows.

"This wall marks the boundary between the known and the unknown," Looma's brother explained. "That is why we do not cross it."

I smiled to myself. This was a silly superstition—the savage's fear of the unknown.

"Are there any enemy tribes living in the interior?" I asked.

"No."

"Wild beasts?"

"I do not know. I have never heard of any."

I mused. "Then what are the Traysomians afraid of?"

"Vling-gaff!" he cried. A bad slip on my part. I should never accuse the Traysomians of fear. Truth to say, it was not a consciously-felt terror that kept them from crossing the wall. It was simply the accepted taboo. To cross must have once led to failure or defeat. The rightness of staying on the outside of the fence was not something to be questioned. It was something solidly established in the Traysomian customs, the same as marriage or funeral ceremonies.

"I believe I understand," I said sympathetically to Looma's brother. "Whether or not there are any dangers within the interior, no one shall ever cross this line of stones."

"Except as tribal custom shall demand it," he replied. After a little pause he added, "Tomorrow you and Looma shall cross."

Again my eyes followed first to the right and then to the left, studying the curious ancient wall. More curiously than ever I gazed across it. The topography beyond seemed to be similar to that which we had just traversed: swamp lands flanking the Lakawog

river, flowered *blutanwa* trees, lush green tropical foliage.

"The spring?" I asked.

"It is somewhere beyond," said Looma's brother. "Looma has told you?"

"Yes. When I first talked to her of marriage she told me that she was born with a sacred obligation that she must fulfill. She told me that whomever she married must be brave enough to conduct her to a sacred spring at the headwaters of the Lakawog."

"Yes." Looma's brother seemed relieved to find that I already knew. He mopped the perspiration from his brown face. We wended our way along the fence to a clearing where the afternoon breeze seeped through, and my companion's tense manner eased and he began to joke.

But my own feelings were far from complacent. Instead of allaying my apprehensions, this conversation had aroused them. I felt that the Traysomian ancestors who had gone to the trouble of building that stone fence must have had some good reason for doing so. Moreover, if danger lurked somewhere within that enclosed area, it was a cinch that no Traysomian could give me so much as a hint of what it was. No one knew.

Or if anyone did know—vling-gaff!

As Looma had told me from the first, the adventure required of her by the tribe was a blind one. To accompany her on a journey into the unknown was the price of marrying her.

Very well, no price would keep me from marrying Looma. No silly superstitions or blind fears—vling-gaff! I cut short my thoughts of fear. Fears, defeats, weaknesses were to be purged from my vocabulary henceforth. Silence upon these matters. I was about to become a Traysomian. I would play the game their way.

OUR wedding was held at dawn. The first shafts of light glinted across the sea as the ceremony began. The pink mists across the broad beach melted like magic curtains on a vast stage.

When the weird stringed music from the native dulcimers sounded forth, people appeared from all corners of the village. They moved slowly to the center of the clearing, chanting the wedding song. Soon they were thronged around us.

Looma and I stood back to back. Our bare heels pressed down into the rich scented black soil of the little earthen pyramid which had been built for us the evening before. Looma's head pressed soft and warm against the middle of my back.

A priestess took up the chant. The words were foreign to me. I had learned many of the unmixed Traysomian words during the past weeks, but most of the ritual was made of words little used in ordinary conversations. However, the musical sounds enthralled me, and I was vaguely disturbed to catch hints of mocking and ridicule from a few natives at the outer edge of the throng. Was there some hidden mischief in this sacred ceremony?

Sometimes between phrases of chanting the low undertones of mocking laughter passed through the throng like a wave of water rolling along a rocky coast before a storm. But no faces betrayed more than the slightest hints of this discordant emotion.

At last the priestess was speaking in words I understood.

"You, Looma, are bound to this man. And you, Trodo—" (that was their name for me: Trodo, meaning *the white one*)—"you are bound to this woman."

Looma's body trembled. I caught her hands and held them tightly.

"But remember, Looma, my daughter," the priestess' voice continued, with a shade of stridency in the tone, "the happiness of one or two is as nothing compared to the welfare of all. You have been born to serve—as few are privileged to serve—the welfare of the Traysomian people."

To me these words did not signify anything terrifying. I was surprised that Looma's fingers should stiffen with tension.

"Is anything wrong?" I whispered.

"Nothing," she returned breathlessly. But her fingers broke out of my grip.

Again the music tinkled and the throng chanted. It was not the wedding song now, but the *clostosong*—the chant of the unknown journey. I breathed deeply. The ceremony was almost over. Soon we would be taking that unknown journey—

The final bit of wedding ritual was, I am certain, a ritual of symbolism, although at the time I did not understand it.

All the young virgins of the tribe, other than Looma herself, approached the little fresh-earth pyramid where we stood. Each girl carried a long rope of *blutamwa* flowers. The end of each rope was placed in my hands, and I was told to hold the ropes up over my head.

The circle of girls spread outward and began to weave around us. The ropes of the highly-scented *blutamwa* wrapped around me as if I were a Maypole.

But not around Looma. She was not caught in the interweaving strands. She danced a weird dance down the side of the earthen pyramid, escaping each strand that threatened to capture her.

At last I was bound and the virgins placed the ropes in Looma's hands. I was ensnared. Looma pulled me toward her, laughing as she did so. Again

I thought I heard that rippling undertone of mockery among the male voices; but it was lost under the gayety and laughter of all.

ON impulse I started to administer a bit of ritual of my own. With a quick jerk of my arms I broke out of my bonds and reached toward Looma, intending to kiss her, American style.

Looma, however, gave a swift tug at the ropes that bound my feet, and I rolled to the ground. The laughing crowd bade me roll out of my tangle, which I did as quickly and gracefully as I could under the circumstances.

I emerged to find that the mood of frivolity and merriment had vanished.

Looma was bidding her parents and her friends good-by. There was no talk of dangers, but there were tears and there were throbbing voices. The quick business-like orders of the priestesses and matriarchs attending the details of our departure were mingled with the solemn and intense words of farewell.

We were off at once. That was the tribal command.

A large group from the wedding crowd accompanied us for several miles inland. But when, at last, we came to the little stone fence, they stopped.

Looma and I stepped across and walked on. A song echoed after us. We trudged slowly, listening to the words. Sometimes a matriarch would sing it, sometimes the entire group of women. They were singing to their men, now; not to us.

I caught the words and I did not like them. They struck me with the same discordant note as the ripples of mocking laughter. The words, partly in Traysomian, ran something like this:

The men, our men, our beloved and constant men

Will still be with us when tomorrow comes.

The rising sun shall find them ours
Tomorrow and tomorrow.

If one must go, let it be one
That we can spare from out of our fold,

That won't be missed from out of
our fold,
Tomorrow or tomorrow.

Over and over the plaintive melody was repeated until we were so far away that we could no longer hear it. Then the silence was only intensified by the sounds of our footsteps and the light whisper of tropical leaves high overhead.

CHAPTER III

Madman of the Jungles

WE walked vigorously until the sun was high. Then we stopped by a clear brook, drank deeply of the cool bubbling water, and deposited our luggage for a brief midday rest. Looma started to prepare some food. I spoke to her softly.

"You are my wife now, Looma."

She nodded and her wide brown eyes looked up at me questioningly.

"Do you know how eager I have been for this journey into the land of the unknown?" I said. "To me it is not something to be—"

I was going to say "feared" but I caught myself.

"This will be our honeymoon, Looma," I said smilingly. The word honeymoon probably conveyed no meaning to her. I drew close to her. "I shall always love you, Looma—"

I started to take her into my arms to kiss her. Quick as a little jungle animal she slipped out of my grasp. Her hand went to her belt, and on the

instant she whipped out a small gleaming dagger.

The weapon, not more than eight inches long, flashed sunlight into my eyes. Looma backed away from me three or four steps and stood, breathing hard like a frightened animal. I folded my arms and waited.

"Trodo," she spoke breathlessly, "I am not angry with you."

"No?"

"No. I do not wish to use this weapon—either upon you or upon myself. It is tipped with poison. A touch of the point would bring either of us death—"

"Looma!" On first impulse I almost leaped toward her, to grab the knife away from her. But I thought better of it. Her half-desperate, half-imploring voice held me at bay.

"No, please—you must listen. There is much that you do not understand, Trodo. You must promise not to love me—"

"Not to love you? But Looma, I *do* love you. I have been terribly in love with you from that first morning—after the funeral—" I stopped myself with the shuddering realization that the taboo of silence barred my way. I must not remind her that she had tried to run away from life. Now, as never before, the tragic conflict that fought within her came home to me. It was this journey that she had sought to avoid—this adventure into the unknown that had been assigned to her at birth. She had even preferred death—

LOOMA turned her eyes away from me. She slipped the dagger back into its concealed case, walked a little distance from me, and dropped down and buried her head in her arms. I had said too much. Without a mention of her fear, I had sent her thoughts bound-

ing back to the event that in itself convicted her of fear.

"Looma, what is it that lies before you? Do you know?"

"I do not know," she answered without looking up.

I moved closer to her, dropped down on the carpet of swamp grass within a few feet of her.

"You must have had some hint of danger—"

"Vling-gaff!"

"That last song they sang, Looma—it practically told me that I would never come back—"

"Vling-gaff!"

"I want to know what's back of all this, Looma. Before I take you any farther I want to know what I'm getting you into. It's all wrong, Looma. The very fact that they've kept the silence taboo over our journey proves that we're heading for defeat—"

"VLING-GAFF!" Looma sprang up and drew the shining dagger. I thought she was going to kill herself then and there. I bounded toward her. I stopped three feet short of her. The point of the weapon was toward me.

"Don't talk, Trodo!" Her tense whisper was barely audible, as if the last of her breath was gone from her lungs. "Don't say another word. If you break the taboo again I'll—"

Her words were spent. She closed her eyes, let her hands fall limply to her sides. Her breasts heaved deeply.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm terribly sorry. I won't say anymore. Come. We must have our meal so we can hurry on."

"I'll go on alone," Looma murmured. "You must go back. You have no obligation to the tribe."

She slipped the knife back into the case, picked up the small blue sacred packet which the priestess had given her, and tried to shoulder one of the

two bags of provisions which I had carried. The bag was much too heavy for her. I smiled at her heroic effort, caught her arm, and persuaded her to sit down and rest and eat.

"You say I have no obligation to the tribe, Looma? You are wrong. You forget that I am a Traysomian now. I am your husband. Wherever you go, I'll go too. I am your protection."

It was late afternoon before this bit of conversation was resumed. We had ploughed through miles of marshy lands and had emerged upon a rising sparsely wooded plain. We could see the thin blue mountainous skyline deep in the distance. Somewhere in those distant blue hills Looma would find the sacred spring from which she must drink.

The sight of her goal, distant though it was, had a heartening effect upon Looma. Again she turned to me with the suggestion that I should go back. She was sure that she could make it alone, now that we were through the swamps.

NOTHING could have struck me as more absurd, and I told her so in forcible terms. "I am your husband. I am going with you, wherever you go. I'm a Traysomian, don't you understand?"

Looma shook her head slowly, looking at me with her steady dark eyes. "You *do* mean it, don't you!"

"Of course I mean it!"

"You seem not to realize that you have been tricked," said Looma with a touch of compassion in her voice.

"Tricked?" The sweat broke out over my face.

"Let us make camp here for the night," said Looma. She went about the business of making a fire and preparing the evening meal. I was of little or no help. I sat in a feverish daze, eating my food absently. When we had

finished, neither of us was in a mood to rest. We gathered up our provisions and marched on by the light of the dying sun. It was a red sun, I think; but everything I saw was red.

"How was I tricked, Looma?" I finally mumbled, after my head had lost a little of its fever. "Are you trying to tell me that you do not love me?"

"I am not free to love you," Looma answered. "My life is not my own until I have fulfilled my duty to my tribe."

"Then why did you marry me, Looma?"

"Believe me, Trodo, it was not to hurt you. I like you, Trodo. That is why"—the girl's eyes filled with tears—"that is why it would be better if you would go. Leave Traysomia, Trodo. I want you to have your own life—"

"Looma, why did you marry me?" I repeated.

"It was the will of the tribe that I marry an outsider," Looma said quietly. "If you had not come, our ships would have gone forth to the ports of other islands in search of someone—someone who would be brave enough to conduct me on my destined voyage into this unknown land."

I nodded. At last I was beginning to see where I stood. The events which had befallen me from the day I came to Traysomia all fitted in with the tribal scheme. I was treated like a prince. I was encouraged to marry into the tribe (since my obvious choice was the beautiful Looma). My proposal of marriage was accepted on the condition that I make a journey with my bride to a sacred spring.

Yes, all of those puzzling incidents of the wedding ceremony had their obvious meanings now: the low undertones of amused laughter from the Traysomian males, the admonition of the priestess that the happiness of one or two was as nothing compared to the

welfare of the tribe, the Maypole ritual in which I was symbolized as the victim of the bride, and finally the song which the women chanted after we had crossed the wall—a song of pride that none of their own men would be lost.

"Now you understand," Looma said, "why I was ordered to carry this dagger. Nothing must come between me and my mission for the tribe."

"Nothing will," I responded.

"Nothing," Looma echoed, and to my surprise she was trembling. She caught me by the arms and looked up at me as if imploring for help. "Nothing . . . Not even love."

Something in my heart rocketed and I too was trembling and breathless. "You mean—that you do—"

Looma's lips were suddenly against mine, she was clutching my bare arms in the warmth of her hands. Then, a few moments later, she drew herself away from me.

"I mean," she whispered, "that I must not—I dare not—yield my heart to love until my mission is done. All my life I have been warned, Trodo. I am bound to kill myself rather than break this pledge. I trust you to *help* me, Trodo."

"I will help you, Looma."

WE had been standing on the crest of a knoll in the deepening twilight. Hand in hand we sauntered on. We walked in silence. Our thoughts were matched to the evening sky—vast, bewilderingly vast, but crystal clear.

A slight rustle sounded from the brush several yards to one side of us. Several times during the day I had been momentarily disturbed by similar rustlings. Occasionally I had wondered whether we were being followed. But I had checked my imaginings with an inward snort of *vling-gaff!*

This time it was not imagination. It

was alive. There was just enough daylight for us to see it approaching.

As between man or beast, it was meant to be a man. But a sorry-looking specimen it was. It was coming toward us. We stopped in our tracks. My small pistol, which I had hoped never to have to use, flipped into my hand instantly.

The man was a white man—perhaps an American, though his features were scarcely discernible, even at a distance of twenty yards. He was a mess of ragged hair and whiskers and rotting clothes.

He carried an old rusty sabre. He took a wide swinging whack at the nearest bush—a gesture which seemed meaningless unless it was meant to convey an impression of power. Then he ambled toward us, swinging the sabre like a weed cutter at the clumps of grass.

Swish—swish—swish! He limped along to the rhythm of his strokes.

By the time he was within ten or twelve yards of us I could see the sharp insane glitter of his eyes. Those eyes were continually shifting. He acted as if he hadn't seen us.

"Who is he?" I whispered to Looma.

"I've never seen him before."

The man came on with his swish-swishing rhythm. He came close enough that the sabre threw blades of grass against our legs. But his course turned away from us just as I was ready to accost him.

"Did he see us?" Looma whispered.

"He must have. Who could he be?"

"I've never heard of him."

A stone's throw away the man's voice broke out in a spine-chilling demoniacal laugh. But he went on. Laughing and singing like a fiend he jogged across the hilltop. For a moment he was silhouetted crazily against the deepening sky. Then he was gone.

CHAPTER IV

The Stone Doll

THE following day the madman crossed our path again.

His approach was much as it had been the evening before. He seemed to materialize out of nowhere, for we had not heard him following us. Some bushes rustled and there he was, swinging his sabre wildly, limping along with a weird rhythm.

He must have seen my gun. He played cautious. He circled wide around us, pretended not to see us. He was only laughing at the grass he whacked down, I suppose, and singing to hear his own voice. There was nothing that I could single out as actually threatening; but his fiendish voice and the gruesome nonsensical rhymes that tumbled off his tongue were enough to make me want to blast him full of holes.

"Slippity-slappity-slickety-slackety . . . Yoo-hoo! . . . Yoo-hoo!"

Every few steps he would change the shouting and singing to a slightly different version. The words were only garbled childish sounds; yet somehow they bristled with subtle implications of threatening danger.

"Slippity . . . slappity . . . slickety . . . slackety . . . slippity . . . slappity . . . *slipknots!*" (Over and over!) "Cut 'em down! Boil 'em dry! Burn 'em up in *stewpots!*" (Again and again!)

It was silly to allow ourselves to be disturbed. Somehow there was no shaking the thought of him off. He was the only human being we had seen. All of our suppressed fears of this unknown land naturally centered on him.

Hours after he had hobbled away over the hills, his idiotic verses kept running through my ears, keeping time to our ceaseless footsteps.

"Slippity-slappity . . . slippity-slappity . . . *Slipknots! Stewpots!* . . ."

"The silly old buzzard," I muttered to Looma. "Do you suppose he haunts every Traysomian couple that comes on this mission?"

Looma said she did not know. "These missions are so rare. This is the first one in many years. I do not remember the last one. I have been told that it occurred near the time of my birth, and that is why I was destined to be next."

"The old fellow looks as if he might have been here a hundred years," I commented. "From his chatter you can tell that he's soured on the world about something. Maybe he drifted onto Traysomia from a shipwreck."

LATE the second evening when we were about to make camp for the night, Looma declared that she had caught sight of the insane old creature again. She pointed to some outcropping rocks fifty yards ahead.

I fired two shots in the general direction that she pointed. Nothing stirred. We searched around for several minutes but found no signs of him. However, the incident was disturbing enough that neither of us felt at ease. Looma suggested that we hike on and make our night's camp elsewhere, and I gladly complied.

For a short time after the night's darkness swept down we stopped and rested, waiting for the late moon. Then we tramped on. We followed along the grassy thinly-wooded hillsides. Under the shower of orange moonlight we could look down upon the misty purple tree-tops that flanked the black waters of the Lakawog. Another day would bring us to the headwaters.

It was a glorious night to walk under the stars hand in hand with one so beautiful as Looma. Not until the moon

began to descend did we stop for a brief night's sleep.

Long after Looma had fallen asleep I sat, wide awake, watching the moonlight and shadows steal across her lovely face. New thoughts were crowding my mind; new inspirations were pounding at my heart.

Once I tried to sleep; but for all my tiredness I could not. The people of Traysomia were too far behind; their superstitions and childish rituals seemed as impotent as dreams. But the memories of my own ways—those superstition-free ways that had been my life before I came to Traysomia—came shining back to me as clearly as the moon and stars overhead.

If Looma could only see life *my* way—if I could only *teach* her—*liberate* her from these superstitious bonds that were as futile as black magic—

"Are you awake, Trodo?" came Looma's soft voice.

"Yes."

"What are you thinking about, that you cannot sleep?"

"Magic," I muttered. Magic! That was it—Looma and her people were victims of belief in magic. Looma was to be pitied, being made to come on this long fatiguing journey in pursuit of some non-existent sacred phantom.

"You must sleep," said Looma with a little smile. Then she closed her eyes.

Poor child! Was it too late to emancipate her from her false world? Might I not yet persuade her? Dared I ask her to delay her journey until I had time to teach her that she had been caught in the grip of shabby lies? If she could only see the light—perhaps she would let me build a boat—we could escape this web.

I closed my eyes. Magic. Magic. A victim of magic—

But I was mistaken. Before dawn I was forced to reverse my judgment.

I WAS almost asleep when I heard the footsteps approaching.

They were stealthy, rhythmic, limping steps. They were accompanied by a swish-swish-swish. It was the madman. I caught sight of his approaching form. Silhouetted against the bright blue sky he looked tall and massive. His head was a huge fluffy mass, ragged with whiskers, as he paused against the background of the descending moon.

I leaped up, seized my pistol, and started toward him.

Looma stirred out of her sleep and came up on one elbow. "What is it?" she asked.

"The madman," I answered. "Keep down!"

Then I charged swiftly toward the weaving tottering black figure. "Get away from here!" I shouted. "Get away or I'll blow your addled brain to bits!"

There was a rustle of motion. The madman's arm flew up, his hand released a missile. Something whizzed through the air, fell harmlessly to the ground at the edge of our camp.

I fired a shot into the air. Whether it frightened him in the least I do not know. He emitted a long fiendish cackling laugh and went racing away at a hard limping pace. The sounds melted away in the deep distance—the swish of his sabre at the grass—his gruesome idiotic singsong verses. He was gone.

I hurried back to Looma. She was on her knees, looking up at me. I put an arm around her.

"Are you—all right, Looma?"

"Vling-gaff," she breathed. I had never heard the word spoken so tenderly. It seemed to mean, I am terribly frightened, and yet I dare not say it. "What did he throw at us, Trodo?"

"A stone, I think." I strolled to the other side of our heaps of luggage and picked up a white object as large as a

shoe. "A stone . . . What the devil—"

"Let me see."

I brought the object back to Looma. I lighted the end of a *fulgor* twig at the embers of our camp fire to serve as a torch. Under the flicker of light we studied the curious chunk of stone.

"It's a doll!" Looma gasped.

Stone though it was, it had been crudely carved into the form of a woman. The features of the face had been daubed on with clay. The body was partially dressed in scraps of rags, which the madman had evidently torn from his own clothing.

As a crowning detail, the stone doll had hair. Fine white fibers from a thistle had somehow been glued over the head to achieve the effect of a woman's hair.

"He's insane!" I muttered, tossing the doll into one of the provision bags. "Go back to sleep, Looma."

THE girl's eyes searched my face sharply. Her lips parted, then pressed together tightly. She turned her face away from me. I did not know what emotion had suddenly filled her. My own thoughts leaped upon the dreadful word, *magic*! I jumped at conclusions. A doll, thrown at us by this demon of our unknown land, might easily start Looma's superstitious mind off on a dangerous tangent. I must head off that tangent.

"It's nothing but a piece of stone, Looma."

Looma didn't answer.

"I'll throw it away if you wish."

"It makes no difference," said Looma. She kept her head turned away from me.

"It hasn't any *power*—that stone—it's dead—"

"Why should I think otherwise?" Looma asked listlessly.

"But I was afraid you—with your

beliefs—might think it held some magic virtue—or evil—”

“It is only a stone,” Looma murmured. “A dead stone. Not like my beliefs. They are living—they have been living for ages—they have grown out of the experiences of my people. They are the truths that we cannot escape.”

She clutched the little sacred package which the priestess had given her, held it tightly to her breast. Her head tilted toward the soft starry skies. For a few moments she was as motionless as a statue, a perfect symbol of the exotically beautiful night. Then, without a word to break whatever strange enchantment had held her, she nestled back to the warm earth and went to sleep.

It was the following morning, while we were breakfasting, that she uttered her only further comment upon the little stone doll. I had happened onto it as I was reaching into one of the bags, had picked it up and passed it over to her.

“Do you want to keep it?” I asked. She shook her head. “Then I’ll throw it away. After all, it doesn’t mean anything to us.” I tossed it aside.

“It had a meaning for the madman,” said Looma quietly. “Are you through eating? Let us be on our way.”

CHAPTER V

Insane Barrier

MY pistol was gone!

We had been hiking briskly for two hours over rugged lands. We had crossed many steep ravines, and I have no doubt that the weapon slipped from my pocket during some perilous climb over precipitous rocks.

“I will wait,” said Looma. “You go back. You will find it.”

“I don’t like to leave you alone, Looma.”

Looma patted her side where the poison-tipped dagger was concealed, and smiled at me confidently. “I will be all right.”

I retraced our steps swiftly. I stopped to peer down into the dark chasms over which we had leaped; I tramped barefoot through dashing rivulets over which I had carried Looma. There were a thousand places where the pistol might have fallen, out of sight and out of reach.

The search was a vain one. At the camp where we had spent the night and breakfasted I plodded about hopefully. All I found was the stone doll, lying where I had thrown it. I chucked it into my pocket. Then I bounded back over the rugged trail to Looma.

The stone doll, I had hoped, might fall out of my pocket exactly as the gun had. Where it would fall would be where the gun had fallen.

No such luck. The doll stuck to my pocket all the way back.

“It is of no importance,” I said to Looma. We hiked on.

As we neared the headwaters of the main stream Looma’s silence became oppressive. Left to my own thoughts I lapsed back into the vain hopes that I might even yet turn her from her purpose.

I spoke casually of the interesting customs of my people back in America. She seemed not to hear me. I mentioned instances of natives from savage lands who had ventured into the American continents and had been so enticed by the civilization they found there that they had never cared to return. Looma only quickened her pace.

She kept a step or two ahead of me. We passed through a light rain. Blustery clouds tumbled along the tops of the low mountains. Fresh winds puffed against our faces, brought to my nostrils the exotic aromas of nameless

mountain flowers. I breathed deeply. It was the breath of an undreamed paradise, it was the breath of Looma's hair blowing back in my face.

We stopped for a mid-afternoon lunch. The sun broke through the puffy white clouds. The Lakawog valley was an artist's orgy of colors—streaks of blues and greens and purples strung together with winding laces of silver and gold.

"Look, Looma!" I said, and the thrill of the discoverer was in my voice. "What a glorious country—and no one living in it!"

"What are you thinking *now*, Trodo?" Looma's quiet murmur was almost accusing.

"Just this, Looma," and I was suddenly clutching her hands tightly, whispering. "In the past hour I have come to realize that I could never persuade you to leave this island, to try the civilization that I have known. You do not hear me when I talk of such things. Very well. But let us face the facts, Looma—"

"What facts?"

"That you and I were meant to love each other—that we are husband and wife. Oh, Looma, if I could just unchain you from this tangle of superstition, you and I could live *here*—in this magic unknown land! It could be ours—"

LOOMA clasped the little blue packet which the priestess had given her. It hung at her throat, a little sacred ornament of colored leather. What it contained neither of us knew, for she was under oath not to open it until she reached the sacred spring. But whenever she pressed it to her breast I knew that my foolish words were powerless to swerve her from her purpose.

"We have only a little farther to go, Trodo. Then it will all be over."

"Yes," I said. *What* would all be over? Did Looma know? Did she mean that this vast hovering ominous danger would be past and gone—that the crisis would be over? Or did she mean that *hope* would be forever gone?

"Are you afraid, Trodo?"

"Vling-gaff!" I ejaculated.

Looma smiled and slipped an arm across my shoulder. "That was what I wanted you to say, Trodo."

The pride that glowed in her eyes was good to see. I knew the tortured feelings behind that mask of pride. There were too many subtle evidences that she was fighting invisible tensions. What she feared now lay less than an hour's journey before us. And she was glad that I could blanket our inescapable emotions with *vling-gaff*.

But the Traysomian word I had uttered had strange reverberations upon me. Vling-gaff! I had blurted it on the instant. It was a part of me. The logic of this strange taboo had somehow penetrated the depths of me, had fastened itself upon me to stay. I would never lose it, not as long as I lived . . .

The spring!

Those faint sounds of bubbling and gushing grew louder with every foot of our progress up the little canyon. Suddenly it was before us, a dashing noisy little cascade of water that spouted from a bold wall of purplish-brown rock. It raced down to a crystal pool and scampered on to form the main stem of the Lakawog.

No wonder that spring had been made sacred. There was a haunting mystery in its rhythmic sounds. Its music would come and go. Sometimes it was full of the voices of little children laughing. Then it would hush, as if the playful little imps were up to some mischief. Next, the teasing voices would melt away, there would be a moment of soft moaning, followed by a low sullen

scolding voice of old age. And again—laughing children.

We both drank deeply. For a few minutes we rested, listening, wondering.

We ascended to the top of the rock cliff high above the spring, stood hand in hand. Looma's fingertips were icy. Her body was trembling. I was carried back to a similar moment during our wedding ceremony. Then, the sea had stretched before us. Now it was the fathomless Lakawog valley. Then, the great unknown land had been behind us. Now—a cave!

Looma opened the little blue leather packet which the priestess had given her. It contained a picture.

The picture, drawn on parchment with indelible colors, was a diagram of the scene above the cliff on which we stood. Crude and old and worn from tight folding, the diagram was an unmistakable representation. The skyline of four irregular crags was at the top. Beneath the tallest crag was the wide open cavern.

From where we stood, only a steep bank of rocks and drifted sand separated us from the mouth of that cavern. On the picture that bank was marked with an arrow pointing upward.

The implication was obvious. Looma's footsteps were being directed into that cave. Moreover, the picture instructed her, in the clearest of picture language, to go into that cave and stay there through a night, a day, and a night.

This effect was achieved by two further details of the ingenious drawing. One was the small figure of a woman kneeling within the cave. The other was a series of three suns in the sky—the first one blacked out, the second shining, and the third blacked out.

WE both studied the diagram for several minutes, comparing the

topographical details to those in the scene before us. When we discussed the meaning of the picture we found that each of us had come to the same interpretation. Looma was to enter the cave. She was to spend a night, a day, and a night there. That, then, was the only ritual for which the tribe had sent her here.

"I'll go with you, Looma," I said.

"No."

"But I must. I can't let you go through this alone."

"It is for me alone," Looma answered, folding the parchment and tucking it back into the little painted packet. "All my life I've known that this must be for me alone. It is my pledge."

I must have acted as if I expected to argue the matter, for Looma's hand and eyes went toward her side where the little poison dagger was concealed.

"As you say," I concluded.

"I am ready now," said Looma.

"But it is still an hour till sunset—"

"I am ready now."

We climbed the bank of stones and loose earth. A few trees and bushes dotted the steep surface. The loose sandy soil appeared to have accumulated by successive landslides. Perhaps it was soil that had washed down from the mouth of the cavern—or sifted down from the action of winds.

There were foot tracks—fresh ones—ascending that precipitous grade.

Our eyes lifted toward the mouth of the cavern. We were not yet high enough to see to it. With each step of our progress the entrance grew wider and higher. Now we could distinguish the wedged stones that formed the ceiling. Here and there were long shafts of evening sunlight piercing through the gaps in the cavern roof.

Such smooth, weird shaped stones! They assumed all sorts of grotesque fantastic shapes. They had been shaped

by the action of winds and blowing sands.

But more fantastic than any of the natural formations was that living object which stood squarely in the center of the cavern entrance!

First we saw his ragged hair, his tattered gray whiskers blowing in the breeze.

Ascending a few steps higher, we could see the complete figure of the mad derelict, swaying restlessly, slapping the ground with his rusty old sabre.

NEITHER of us was surprised. I had felt instinctively that this forlorn creature was bent on taking his madness out on us sooner or later. Thirty or forty steps lay between us and him.

"Keep back of me," I said, taking Looma by the hand.

"Wait," Looma whispered. "This way!"

We circled a little to one side, for Looma had noticed a half-dead tree. She pointed to a straight tough limb that was the right size to fit into my hands. It was but the work of a minute to convert the limb into a club. I weighed the finished product in my hands. It felt right.

"Slippity-slappity-slickety-slackety!" the insane old man ripped out in a razor-edged voice. He followed through with an uproarious volley of laughter. His glittering eyes crisscrossed us as we approached him.

"Stay back, Looma," I muttered, "until I clear the path."

The crazy man stopped his laughter and set up another nonsensical rhythm—a grotesque mixture of words and clangs of his sabre against a rock.

"Slippity-slappity (clang!) . . . Slippity-slappity (clang!) . . . slippity-slappity (clang!) . . ."

At the same time he wagged his old

head vociferously and did a hobbling dance.

"Listen, you!" I shouted. "Chase yourself down the bank! You're not wanted here! . . . Get on!"

The old man's words and music took a new turn, still in rhythm to his dance. "Let me kill her. I'm your friend. Let me kill her. I'm your friend. Let me—"

"He's hopeless!" I grumbled to Looma. I had a profane notion that if this cave was supposed to be sacred, he was certainly doing his blessed best to put a curse upon it. I swung my club threateningly. "Get away, damn you!"

"Let the lady tell me . . . Let the lady tell me . . . Let the lady tell me!" the old man squawked.

Looma accepted the challenge. With a depth of tone that was afire with purpose she called, "I am going in. I ask you to get away!"

To my surprise the madman hushed his stream of blabbing, turned toward Looma with a deep lopsided gesture that was meant for a bow. He started down the hill.

On the third or fourth step he stopped and began to chop at a tree root with his sabre. Clang! Clang! Clang! Without looking back at us he struck up a new singsong verse:

"If you *knew*, you'd rather die . . . If you *knew*, you'd rather die . . . If you *knew*, you'd rather die! . . ."

"Wait, Looma—not yet!" I hissed. She was moving cautiously toward the big open cavern. I caught a glimpse of the place and saw nothing to arouse my alarm. It was a single big open room, walled and roofed with the curious sand-worn stones. There was obviously nothing in the place itself to be feared. It was only the nearness of the madman that I feared. "Don't let yourself get trapped in a corner till I've chased this devil into the river—"

Then it happened. And so swiftly it

happened that it had all the earmarks of sudden death.

The strength of a madman is only matched by the quickness of a madman. With a swiftness and a cunning that I would have thought impossible for this limping old demon, he sprang around and flung his sabre—squarely at Looma!

I LEAPED blindly. A blazing stab of pain cut me through the shoulder. I started to tumble down the embankment. I barely caught my balance—with the aid of the extra weight that swung outward from my shoulder—the sabre!

The next instant Looma was tugging at that sabre, jerking it out of the tight muscles that had caught it. She tore it free. The blood gushed down from the gash that had rendered my arm helpless. The madman cut loose with a hideous laugh.

Laughing, he came toward us. I was too slow to snatch the sabre from Looma's hand, for I still had a deadly grip on the club. I swung. His arm flew up to take the blow. It struck hard. It unbalanced him. But with the strength and swiftness of madness he froze onto the weapon.

Down we went together, tumbling pell-mell over rocks and crusty heaps of sand. I tried to kick free of him. He got me by the good arm, sank his nails into my flesh, clung to me as if his fingers were so many steel bolts. Club and sabre were gone and forgotten by the time we rolled out onto the broad level cliff. It was teeth and nails and hair now.

We rolled to a stop. We tore at each other like beasts.

For an instant we were caught in a deadlock so tight that all motion ceased. His teeth closed down on the wrist of my good arm. With that same hand

I pulled hard and steady at his whiskers. I was above him. Blood from my ripped shoulder splashed down on his brown sweat-smeared chest.

Strength against strength—life and death at stake! And yet all motion seemed to have ceased in this instant of deadlock. From beyond the edge of the cliff the mocking melody of the spring sang up to us. From the sandy slope above us came sounds of Looma's footsteps. Was she coming down to help me with the job I couldn't finish?

The strength of my arm, the tug of my fingers at the ugly whiskers brought the old man's head back—back—back over the edge of a rock that my knees had crowded under his neck. I gave a little lunge. My weight crushed down, my right knee crunched his Adam's apple. The demon beneath me choked and gagged. My right wrist slipped free of his teeth. There was scarcely the strength left in my good arm to deliver the punches I struck at his head—

But why should I strike him? The fellow was dead.

Looma was beside me. The faint came over me very slowly. I fought it. I fought as hard to stave off that faint as I had ever fought anything in my life. And for good reason. Looma was clutching me in her arms, she was kissing my face, kissing my lips—

Blackness—blackness—deeper and deeper. Burning pain, mingled with soothing moments—a tightening at my shoulder—no more flow of blood—cool water over my arms, over my face—softness at my lips—blackness, blackness—why did I have to pass out. . . ?

CHAPTER VI

The Cave of Voices

IT seemed days and days. Nights and nights. It was nightmarish. I

tried to wake myself up. I couldn't. I couldn't force my eyes open. I couldn't make my arms move. And all the while I was having such frightful dreams. Sand—sand—sand! It kept sifting over me. It was going to cover me up. I was being buried alive in sifting sand.

But I could still breathe. I was still alive. My arms were burning frightfully. The sand must be blazing, must be blowing out of a fire. Still, there was a coolness at my forehead—a strange coolness! If I could only wake up!

Those voices! Would they ever cease? Whenever the sands blew over me the voices were there—deep fathomless whispers—the talking of the winds—the mysterious voices of the night—the howling cries of blowing sands that brought pain and death. Why, the cave was full of them—and they were all talking in the ancient Traysomian tongue—mystery words of the Traysomian tribe that I could never understand.

Cave? What cave? Where was I? Where was Looma? I wanted to call her. I couldn't. I couldn't bring myself out of these depths of blackness. Sleep was on me. It had me bound. It wouldn't let me go.

Sands . . . Voices . . . Winds that howled and laughed and whispered in mystic Traysomian words . . . Looma . . . Looma . . .

I AWOKE to find that I was lying somewhere under a vast, clear starlit sky. It was the last hour of night. The waning moon was nearing the western horizon. A faint gray of morning streaked the east. A wide panorama of purple mists spread before me—the Lakawog valley. My first thought was, what a glorious, magical land—a land of plenty with nobody living in it. It

could be Looma's and mine!

Looma! Where was she?

In the cave, of course. Gradually everything came back. I was lying high above the sacred spring, far back from the edge of the cliff that overhung it. I could barely hear the teasing laughing voices of the falling waters.

Above me stretched the heaps of sand, dotted by rocks and trees and foottracks, barely visible in the early morning twilight. And farther above, the sacred cave—

A gentle wind was blowing through that cave. I could hear its weird song, its mystic whispers. I could see little lines of bright sand sift down the hillside. The tracks which we had made had sifted full. And now, as my dreams came back on me sharply, I discovered that sand had drifted close around me, half covering my legs, nearly burying the provision bags that Looma had evidently tucked around me.

I tried to rise up. In spite of the torturing pains through my shoulder and arms, my muscles responded to my will. I came up on my hands and knees. The tightness in my shoulder told me that the healing processes were at work. And I knew at once that I had Looma to thank for that. She had bound me with cloth bandages, and though the material was crude rough cloth, the skill of her efforts had been effective.

Leaves dropped from my forehead as I struggled to my feet—leaves that had helped to cool my fever during the recent nights.

How many nights had passed? Perhaps not more than two; certainly no less. The crusted healing surfaces of my wounds proved that.

I cast my eyes about for signs of the body whose life I had choked out. By the growing light of dawn I beheld the mound of stones a few yards be-

yond me. Looma had taken care of that, too.

Already the madman's grave, swept over by sand, had begun to blend in with the hillside scenery as a thing forgotten. Only the old rusty sabre, standing sentinel-like near the mound, brought back the vision of that haunting terror that had come so near to claiming Looma's life.

"Looma!" I called in a croaking voice. I staggered weakly up the hillside toward the mouth of the cave. "Looma! Looma!"

SHE was there. She was breathing slowly, deeply. I thought she must be asleep, so slowly and evenly was she breathing. But she was not lying down. She was on her knees. Her back was toward me. The darkness of the cave was upon her. Such light as there was gave a faint glow to the handle of her dagger, and to her bare arms.

"Looma!" my voice lowered to an intense whisper. Something in her attitude warned me—frightened me—bid me stay back. She was in a sacred ecstasy that must not be interrupted.

"Looma!" I breathed, but the weird whispers of the winds through the cave took my breath away. There was something paralyzing about those wisps of voices. They were so unmistakably accented like words of the Traysomian tongue. They were the voices of nature whose mysteries were too deep for any creature of civilization to fathom.

Slowly, ceaselessly, Looma's shoulders rose and fell with the ever-so-slight movement of her breathing. At the cavern entrance I waited, watching. I was within thirty feet of her. I knew that I must go no closer. I must wait until the light of dawn melted away the shadows that engulfed her. Then her mysterious sacred rites would be done. She would come to me at last, freed of

the chains that had bound her from me.

At last her arms drew upward, her shadowy form rose weakly. She was about to turn.

"Looma!" I called eagerly. "I'm waiting for you—"

"*Please go back!*" Her voice was low and heavy, and her words were spoken slowly as if she were weighed down with some great sorrow.

"But, Looma—" I gasped. I was somehow choked with nameless fears. Why didn't she turn and come to me? Instead, she was motioning with a slight wave of her fingers for me to go back.

I obeyed. Several feet from the entrance of the cave I waited.

I saw her come forth into the morning twilight. I saw, and every drop of blood in my body went cold. *Looma was a feeble, white-haired old woman.**

*One of the most venerable, and most superstitiously regarded legends of the South Sea Islands is the legend of the wise old women who rule the destinies of the tribe. For whole generations they live on, unchanging, ever-old, never aging further. And from their lips come the wise words that guide the tribe in every important decision.

Scientifically, there is no explanation of these weird old women, but native stories hint of uncanny things. It is not impossible that radioactive emanations, perhaps from some deep-buried deposit of pitchblende, filled the cave where Looma knelt, and acting upon the tissues of her body, so changed them that she became, physically, an old woman in a few days. And yet, in spite of the outer effect, she remained unimpaired mentally, and was still physically strong, and able to live out her life, to the benefit of the tribe.

Obviously, by so changing her body, her sole remaining position in life would be mental, the pursuit of thought, wisdom, and advice. No longer, due to the radiations, would her normal function of life, motherhood, womanliness, be possible. Scientifically, there is a great logic contained here, and who can say that primitive peoples have not discovered the simple truths of psychology that modern psychologists know?

What happened to the beautiful Looma may appear fantastic, but basically, its reality may stagger modern science, when its phenomenon is more fully studied by interested scientists. Perhaps, in future times, civilization may utilize basically the same principles to cause human beings to adapt themselves to specialized tasks for the betterment of the race.—Ed.

She did not turn to look at me. She made her way cautiously down the bank of loose sand, aiding herself by catching hold of trees and projecting stones.

Nor did she stop when she reached the broad level top of the cliff above the spring. She plodded on, slowly and carefully, down the precipitous rocky trail over which we had ascended together only two evenings before.

I followed.

At the mirror-surfaced pool a few yards below the spring I caught up with her.

"Looma!" I cried.

She was kneeling at the edge of the pool. The white light of dawn was on her face. She was looking into the mirror of waters. She saw the waves of white hair that fell over her shoulders, she saw the aged wrinkled face—a face that was kindly and mellow with the wisdom of old age. And she gave no expression of surprise at what she saw.

AT last her dark beautiful old eyes lifted to meet mine.

"Trodo," she spoke, and the very earth seemed to tremble beneath me, "what has happened can never be changed. What *is* is as it should be. I would not have it otherwise . . . except for you."

"You *knew*—" I choked.

"I did not know," she answered slowly. "I only guessed. But now—" she looked intently at her reflection in the water—"the veils of mystery are gone. I know what lies before me. The winds of wisdom have swept over me. I have been endowed, Trodo, with the timeless truths that dwell within the island of Traysomia. They are mine to give back to my people."

She arose and stood, a venerable figure. Her watery old eyes were bright with the mystic light of knowledge, her

thin fingers clutched the little blue leather packet that hung from her withered neck.

"I am to be the wise old woman of the tribe, Trodo. Now that I am what I am, there is nothing in the world that I could ask except a few years of life to serve my people."

"Looma!" I cried and I was startled by the note of horror that my voice betrayed. "If I hadn't let you go in that cave, Looma—"

Even as I spoke my hand brushed against the object that weighed in my pocket. Dazedly I brought it forth—the stone doll. In my trembling hand it rested—the *warning* that the madman had thrown us. Obviously the features of that doll were meant to represent an old woman; the white thistle fibers were the white hair of old age.

"He tried to tell us, Looma!" I gasped. "He tried to tell us—and I killed him! *Looma, if I had known—"*

"Vling-gaff, Trodo!"

That was all. Just vling-gaff. But the depth of compassion in Looma's voice as she uttered her last words to me told me the volumes that would always be left unsaid. . . .

I followed after her for part of a day's journey, but whenever she looked back to see me coming she waved for me to stay. There was a gentleness in the wave of her hand that I found compelling. She seemed to be saying, All wisdom is mine . . . I know best . . . You must not come . . . Though I am aged my step is sure . . . I will get back . . . Your part is done . . .

At last I grew faint and dropped by the way. After sleep and food I slowly wended my way back toward the center of the island. I drank at the spring. I made my way up to the top of the cliff that overhung it. Above me, where the land sloped upward toward the

(Concluded on page 135)

25th CENTURY SHERLOCK

By DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

Fear struck into Doctor Martin's brain—sheer, petrifying terror that froze his heart; and he died because he was afraid to fall six inches!

INTERPLANETARY INSPECTOR CARSON removed the fat Venusian cigar from the corner of his mouth and placed it with tender care on the ash tray next to his elbow. Reaching out a pudgy paw, he flicked off the button on the newstape reposing on the corner of his desk. The machine ceased its clicking, and the long sheet of paper that had been spitting out of it into a wastebasket suddenly stopped.

Carson tore off a section of the printed matter from the machine. Then, planting his feet on his desk, he leaned back in his chromalloy chair, sighed deeply, and began to read.

"Damn," Carson muttered. "Damn all editorial writers."

The door opened, and Brisk Haynes, Carson's young assistant, stepped into the room, face wreathed in a mile-wide grin.

"Hi-ya, Chief," Haynes saluted. "Seen the editorials on the newstape? See what they're calling you now?"

"Twenty-fifth Century Sherlock," Carson muttered with obvious distaste. "Lotta nonsense!"

"Now Chief—" Brisk Haynes began, obviously relishing his superior's discomfort.

Carson cut in: "All bunk, all prattle!" He rose, to better give vent to his favorite gripe. "There's no more

difference in criminal deduction today than there was six centuries ago. You know it as well as I do." He was panthering angrily back and forth. "This streamlined age is getting me down, I tell yuh. We oughtta go on a vacation, both of us. Find some isolated little asteroid and rough it for a while. Get away from it all.

"Modern crime deduction, bah! You'd think I ran around the interplanetary chain with a test tube in my pocket and a slide-chromometer behind my ear. You'd think that every damn scientist this side of Mercury was making it soft for me to find out who-dun-it.

"Hell," Carson described a vicious arc with his fist, "I gotta fight the most advanced methods of crime ever known to man—and with nothing more than the same set of brains that Sherlock Holmes, Perry Mason, and those others had. It's getting me down!"

Carson suddenly decided. "Vacation? Why not, eh? Why not?" He pulled forth a fat, fresh Venusian cigar. "Let's get going!"

CARSON AND HAYNES were in their rented rocket cruiser. In the back of the ship was stacked enough paraphernalia to equip an asteroid camping vacation for a month. Space suits, ground gear, odds and ends that would



"Back into the ship, you fool! Put on your glasses—or you'll go blind from cosmic rays!"

all go to making their stay on the asteroid that had been selected more comfortable, were piled there.

Puffing on his inevitable Venusian cigar, Interplanetary Inspector Carson sat beside Brisk Haynes at the control panels.

"This is the life," Carson remarked. "I haven't felt as free and easy since I was a punk in the Space Patrol Force." He sighed. "Those were the good old days—"

Haynes glanced at the control panel. "We're due to find our paradise in a short while. I'd better start cutting down our g's, so we won't overshoot it. Understand it's a dinky little blob."

"Dinky, but deserted," Carson corrected. "And how I go for that last word!" He closed his eyes. "Deserted; peace and quiet; nobody who wants to disintegrate somebody else!"

Haynes let out a yipe. "There she is!" His eyes danced excitedly. "Down below!"

They grounded the little rocket cruiser on the tiny asteroid precisely ten minutes later. Carson was the first out of the ship, for he had donned his space gear as they leveled down. He was waiting on the bumpy terrain when Haynes appeared at the door.

"Hey," Carson shouted through his voice amplifier, "get back in the ship, you nit wit. Get back and put on your polaroid specs!"

Haynes had been about to step down from the cabin of the ship. He, too, was clad in space gear. But unlike Carson, he wore no treated glasses beneath the turret of his helmet.

"Do you wanta go space blind in two minutes?" Carson repeated. "Good Lord, Brisk, get back and put your polaroids on!"

Haynes grinned, tapping the side of his glass turret helmet, rolling his eyes foolishly to indicate that he must have

been crazy. He reappeared a minute later. The glasses covered his eyes inside the turret. In his arms he carried some of the camping equipment.

Carson spoke into his amplifier again. "Let's leave the junk here, Brisk, and take a look around our new home first!"

Haynes nodded, depositing the equipment on the asteroid crust at his feet.

CARSON looked around the lumpy, knolled crust of the asteroid. Some of the protruding bumps on its surface were high enough to conceal the stretches that lay beyond. He pointed to one of these knolls, the highest.

"Let's climb that lump," he suggested. "We can get a good view from there."

Haynes smiled inwardly. It was typical of his Chief's outlook on anything concerning exertion, that he should eliminate as much physical action as possible. But the butterball assistant nodded agreement, and the two set out for the asteroid rise. Minutes later, with Carson breathing heavily, they stood on the top.

The knoll was, indeed, the tallest on the little asteroid, and from this vantage point they could see the surrounding stretches of planet crust. The entire asteroid couldn't have been more than three miles in diameter. However, the view encompassed the entire horizon, and was quite clear.

And suddenly, Haynes grabbed Carson by the arm, his voice coming sharply over the amplifier. "Chief! Look over there!" He was pointing toward a comparatively even stretch of asteroid crust less than a mile away. A crust rutted with the smallest of knoll ridges—on which lay the body of a man clad in space gear!

Carson's oath of surprise was choked off abruptly as he began to descend the steep slope of the summit in hasty, jerky

strides. Brisk Haynes was at his heels, and by the time they had reached the more level stretches the butterball assistant was running well ahead of his Chief.

Haynes arrived at the side of the figure in the space suit first, and was bending over beside the body when Carson pulled up puffing heavily.

"Who is it? What, how—" Carson began.

Frowning, Haynes looked up. "It's a guy, Chief. Kind of old, and dead."

"Killed?" Carson's question was automatic.

Haynes frowned in deeper perplexity. "Dunno. Can't see any evidences of violence. Doesn't look like he's been lying here long."

CARSON was now bending over the body. Haynes had rolled it over, so that the face was visible. It was, as Carson's assistant stated, an old man inside the turret of the space suit. His eyes were closed tightly, and his face—with its gray moustache and vandyke beard—was rigid in death. Carson had stripped off the fellow's space gauntlet, and was removing his own—momentarily exposing his flesh to the empty vacuum so that he could ascertain the time the old man had been dead.

"Body's still warm," Carson observed, puzzled. Swiftly, he put his own space gauntlet back on.

"I didn't see any craft around here, other than our own rocket cruiser," Haynes cut in. "How in the blazes could this old guy ever get up here. How, or why, is he here now?"

Carson stood up. "That's just what I intend to find out. If we take a closer look around this, ah *deserted* little asteroid, we might—"

Haynes saw the change in his expression. "What's—" he began.

"It's my turn to point," Carson said.

"Look down there—against the side of the knoll—see it?"

Haynes wheeled to face the direction in which his Chief was pointing. "Well, I'll be disintegrated! An alienoid metal shack—a lean-to, up against the side of the knoll!"

"We couldn't see it from the summit," Carson grunted. "Let's pick this old guy up and take him over there. Evidently that's his hangout."

Together, they carried the body of the old man across the several hundred yards that separated them from the newly discovered alienoid shack. It was built against the side of the knoll, and must have been approximately twenty feet in width, sixty in length. It was of one story construction, evidently recently erected, for the alienoid was gleaming new. The door to the shack was closed when they arrived there, but Carson, leaving Haynes with the body, pried it open, gaining entrance to the second door which formed an airlock.

By the time Haynes had dragged the body inside the airlock, Carson was pounding on the inner door.

"How do you know there's anyone in there?" Haynes asked. "This old guy might have bunked here alone."

"These things only lock from the inside," Carson said.

AND then, to the sound of shuffling feet, a fumbling against the door panel, the second door swung inward. A sleepy eyed young man stood there, looking bewilderedly at the panorama that confronted him.

Then, he seemed to spy the body of the old man for the first time. His eyes widened in horror. "Good God, Doctor Martin!"

He was speaking to Carson and Haynes, now. "How, what, who are you people? Where did—" he choked off in confused consternation, obviously

struggling to find a meaning for all this.

"Know him, eh?" Carson said, helping Haynes to bring the body inside the shack. "But of course you would. Maybe you can tell us how all this happened. What's your name?"

The young fellow pushed a wild lock of black hair from his eyes, his hand shaking visibly.

"My name is Brophy. I was Doctor Martin's assistant. We've only been here a month—working on our experiment. Who are you people? How did you get here?" His voice was husky and uneven.

"Name's Carson. This is Haynes. Interplanetary Police."

They had laid the body of the old man on a bunk in the corner of the room, and now Haynes and his Chief stood facing the shaken young man. Haynes put in:

"We came here thinking the asteroid was deserted. Sort of a vacation. Didn't know there'd be anyone else about."

The young fellow, Brophy, was regaining some measure of composure. But Carson was talking now.

"How did this happen?" He jerked a thumb in the direction of the body on the cot. "Give us the story, and an explanation, if you can think of any. The old fellow hasn't been dead over twenty-four hours, if that long."

"It must have been those shots—possibly an overdose," young Brophy said despairingly. "I warned him that he might be taking too much. But he insisted. It's my fault, I shouldn't have fallen asleep. I should have watched him. But I was tired, God, I was tired. He must have left the shack when I slept."

Carson frowned. "What's it all about, man? Explain!"

"The experiment," Brophy went into a rapid explanation, "on which we were

working. It concerned artificial stimulation of phobia, synthetic creation of fears. Through it we were trying to determine the fear spots in the human mind. This would lead to a possible elimination of them. Doctor Martin thought that it would be best if we got away, to some isolated asteroid, to conduct the final experiments in our work. They involved testings of the serums we'd discovered. Martin wouldn't agree to try it on anyone but himself."

"That's why you came up here, eh? Scientific solitude, is that it?"

Brophy nodded. "I was to carry on the tabulations after we'd tried our serums on Doctor Martin. He would be inoculated with them—and I'd watch and record his actions."

"Inoculated with phobia stimulations, eh?" Haynes put in.

"Yes, we'd been doing so for the past three weeks. Doctor Martin wouldn't hear of my taking any chances on the inoculations. He insisted that he, and he alone, should run the risk."

"Risk?" Carson's voice was perplexed.

"Yes," Brophy answered. "There was a certain risk involved. You see, inoculation of phobias made the person under inoculation act strangely—dazed, as from a drug. Undoubtedly, this was the reason why Doctor Martin wandered off while I slept. He had been under the influences of an inoculation. But I thought he was sleeping, so I risked taking a few winks myself. Oh, God," the young man's voice broke, "I shouldn't have been so selfish!"

Carson shook his head sympathetically. "It isn't all your fault lad. From what you say, he just wandered off, died a few hundred yards from the shack last night."

HAYNES broke in. "Would anything about the drug influence his

death? That is to say, would his being outside of the shack under that condition have anything to do with his dying?"

"How did you find him?" Brophy asked suddenly.

Carson closed his eyes momentarily. "On a very small ridge; couldn't have been more than a half a foot from the ground. He had closed his hands tightly against the sides of the ridge, as though he was hanging on."

Brophy's sob seemed torn from the boy's heart. "No! No! It's too horrible, oh God. That was it, then. It was directly the fault of the serum. He was inoculated with a fear of heights—don't you see?"

Haynes snapped his fingers. "Good Lord, Chief. Fear of heights. That *must* have been it!" He shuddered. "The old boy probably wandered out there, dazed, fell on the half-foot high ridge. Maybe he imagined himself at a height, and—" he turned suddenly to Brophy. "How heavy was the inoculation? Would the fear possibly stop a man's heart?"

Brophy nodded. "Yes." His voice was still husky. "The fear—when administered artificially—is naturally much more powerful in its effect; increased to much greater strength. That was why Doctor Martin was in constant danger unless watched."

Carson cleared his throat. "But the ridge was only a half-foot from the ground. The inoculation wouldn't increase his sense of heights, would it? It couldn't make him believe that he was much higher than he was, throw things out of proportion, could it?"

Young Brophy shook his head, sadly. "It's quite possible that it could. I'm not certain. But in our experiments in other phobia inoculations judgment was impaired."

"Then that," Haynes said softly,

"clears up the picture. The old guy looked down a half-foot, and it looked like he was a mile high. His fear of what he thought was a tremendous height killed him, stopped his heart cold."

Brophy was lighting a cigarette with hands that trembled. "I am afraid that that is the solution, gentlemen—a horrible solution." His shoulders shook convulsively.

"Possibly," Carson said. Brophy looked up at him suddenly, and Haynes turned to face him. Both were astonished at what they saw. The Inspector was pointing an atomic pistol at young Brophy.

"Truss our young friend up, Brisk," Carson ordered Haynes, "and take him to our cruiser. We've just had our vacation spoiled by the unpleasant duty of bringing a murderer back to Earth!"

"But, Boss!" Haynes was astonished. "The kid—"

"The kid said too much. Scientists usually do. They gotta make things too elaborate," Carson cut in. "Truss him up!"

"**M**AYBE I'm getting thicker and thicker," Brisk Haynes told his Chief, as he guided the little rocket cruiser back toward a Spaceways Base. Their prisoner was securely bound and lying against the equipment—unbaptized—in the back of the ship.

"Maybe you are," Carson conceded smugly.

"But—" Haynes began.

"Look," Carson said patiently. "Young Brophy evidently saw our ship approaching the asteroid. Maybe he killed the old guy a few hours before, maybe a few minutes before. Anyhow, he saw us coming.

"Knowing he had plenty of time, and knowing that he had proof of the experiments for his background, he took Doc-

tor Martin outside the shack, left him on the ridge. He knew we'd find him there if we landed. Then he went back to the shack and pretended he'd been sleeping too long. That was his act when we broke in on him."

"Yeah, I know that. But—" Haynes began.

"Willya listen!" Carson snapped. "Like I say, the kid waited, and sure enough, we appeared with the body. He had his explanation all set—with positive proof, in the experiments. He was almost a little bit pleased—although he didn't dare show it—because we were witnesses. But like all scientists, he wanted to make it too perfect. He could have said the old guy wandered off, and just died out there, from plain heart failure. He could have said that and been perfectly clear."

"He could have said that," Haynes admitted.

"But he didn't. He thought he had an even better yarn in the stuff about the experiments—which were actual fact—so he used the phobia hocus pocus instead. The old guy had been inoculated with a fear of heights. But the sight of little half-foot drop couldn't have killed him."

"Scientifically, it could have!" Haynes protested.

"Yeah," Carson agreed caustically. "*If he could have seen it!*"

"Seen it?" Haynes almost bleated.

"Of course. Didn't you notice that when we found the old guy he wasn't wearing any polaroid spectacles?"

Haynes nodded.

Carson continued. "So if he wasn't

wearing polaroid glasses, he would have been space blind by the time he had covered the distance from the shack to where we found him. Space blind, and unable to see anything—especially a tiny half-foot edge on a ridge! *So, not being able to see it, he wouldn't have known it was there, and his fear wouldn't have killed him!*"

Haynes sighed. "Okay, right again."

Carson grinned. "If it will help for me to put the last piece of the puzzle together for you, listen to this. He was killed when under the terrible fear of height. But not from any height itself. Young Brophy probably told him that he was at a great height, while the old guy was dazed, and that was what killed him!" *

"All of which proves your pet point all wrong, Chief," said Haynes triumphantly.

"What point?"

"About science not helping you to be a Twenty-fifth Century Sherlock. You couldn'ta solved this crime without science!"

Carson smiled indulgently. "Haynes, didn't it ever occur to you that the strongest bit of evidence of all, and one that even a Hottentot could have caught—and you missed—was the fact that the airlock of the shack was *locked from the inside*? And that therefore Dr. Martin *couldn't* have wandered off while Brophy slept? Science? No, my dear Haynes, I repeat, not science—just a set of brains."

"Well anyway, Chief," said Brisk Haynes sorrowfully, "whatever it was, it sure ruined our vacation!"

*The power of suggestion is amazing in its scope of possibility. Hypnotic suggestion can cause a person to carry out orders after they are no longer under the spell of the hypnotizer, and no question will arise in the victim's mind as to why he or she is carrying out the order.

Therefore, it doesn't seem at all impossible to suggest a condition to a person whose mind has

been made extremely receptive to reception—as Doctor Martin's was by the scientific drug injected into him by his assistant—so as to cause death by heart failure through a sense of extreme fear. It is well known that fear, if powerful enough, can cause great bodily harm through cessation of normal gland functions. It can easily stop the heart and cause death.—Ed.

SECRET OF THE STONE DOLL

(Concluded from page 127)

mouth of the cave, the winds had quieted. Loose sand no longer sifted down.

I picked up the old rusty sabre that projected sentinel-like from the ground. I ambled back down the rocky trail, paused to look at my own reflection in the crystal pool. My face had become a little older, more weather-beaten,

somewhat ragged with neglected beard.

As I moved on, going nowhere in particular, a hazy thought slipped through my mind. When, in some distant year, another Traysomian bride should be brought to the cave by her young husband to fulfill her tribal appointment, I would doubtless be the madman who waited in their path.

ADOPTED SON OF THE STARS

(Concluded from page 105)

tled for admission to his mind. There was no Wilhimena in this apartment, and even the clothes he was wearing were not the drab garments that usually concealed his slight frame.

Then, looking down, Wilbur realized for the first time that he clutched a cocktail glass in his hand and that he stood—clad in a red velvet dressing gown—before a duplex, super-tone radio.

Understanding broke on Wilbur like the sun beaming suddenly through gray clouds. He smiled and squared his shoulders and tasted the drink in the glass he held in his hand.

It was delightful. He took another sip and his smile widened until he was chuckling merrily. He laughed out loud. It was a good, ringing laugh and it echoed cheerily through the sumptuous apartment.

Wilbur laughed until his sides ached, until he collapsed on the soft sofa, doubled up with the gleeful mirth that coursed through him. He didn't stop until the tears streamed down his cheeks and he sat up too weak to laugh any more.

It was glorious. And the most glori-

ous part of it was the fact that Wilhimena had caused this wonderful change.

For her last spiteful wish had been that she had never met him. *And what was more important she had gotten her wish!*

For here he was—Wilbur Wunch, Bachelor. Wilbur Wunch, who had never met Wilhimena Wunch. A free, different Wilbur Wunch, who enjoyed the same delights and advantages that one Joe Bloddget enjoyed.

But that was not why he laughed until he was weak. It was Wilhimena and her loss of the million dollars that made him laugh. For if she had never met him she could never have wished and never received the money. Oh, it was glorious.

He sank back into the sofa and picked up his glass. Through the high windows of his glorious new apartment he could see a myriad stars winking down at him, friendly and cheerful.

He winked back. "You said I was going to be lucky," he chortled, "and buddies you sure gave me the jackpot."

Then he started laughing all over again.

That astrology stuff *was* okay!

THE END

»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Author of

ADOPTED SON OF THE STARS

I WAS born at a very early age in Chicago, and for the next few years took little interest in anything but vitamins. Upon reaching the abuse of reason I learned that my family had transplanted me to Mobile, Alabama, a sunny little place hidden right down in the southernmost tip of the state.

It was here I blasted my fond parents' hope in me by planting six of a neighbor's chicks three feet in the ground, in the optimistic expectation that chicken trees would result.

After my universe had stopped rocking from this botanical fiasco I settled down to comparatively placid existence. My most vivid and pleasant recollections of this period are of my father playing the piano and singing, and of myself—on a never-to-be-forgotten afternoon—stowing away three bowls full of chicken gumbo.

But before I could become thoroughly acclimated to the sunny southland (Chamber of Commerce please remit) my unpredictable family had pulled up stakes again and moved back to Chicago. Here I began to grapple in earnest with the shrouded mysteries of higher education.

It was a losing battle, I'm afraid. I spent a good deal of time at Loyola Academy, took a few courses at Chicago University, studied radio writing at Northwestern University and then, spent and gasping, sagged against the ropes while my English Professor threw in the towel. My associations with institutions of higher learning(?) have not been conspicuously fortunate, but I am willing to make the magnanimous concession that half of the difficulty was my own fault.

Thus splendidly equipped by my instructors to be discriminating in my choice of a relief agency, I sallied forth, lance and shield gleaming, to find myself a sinecure. I bounced around quite a bit and finally stopped for a while in Northern Wisconsin, where I worked successively as a lumber

jack, fishing guide, truck driver and finally, dance hall bouncer.

Somewhere along the line I started to write, batting out a few radio shows which I confidently expected the networks to snap up. Needless to say they didn't.

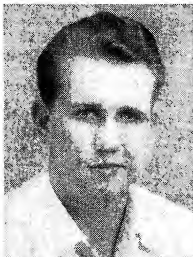
Dashed to earth, as it were, by this evidence of the amazingly bad judgment of the powers-that-be in radio I plodded moodily about the city and in my weakened and disillusioned state succumbed to the blandishments of the commercial world. In short I got a job.

But when my head cleared, I started writing again, working at night on the inevitable play that it seems every writer must get out of his system. In nine out of ten cases a good laxative would accomplish about the same results, but that is neither here nor there. Mine was an alleged comedy in three acts and I was convinced it had oomph. I slaved over it, my flagging hopes revived by roseate visions of Broadway openings, flash bulbs flaring, ovations, as I rose in my box to acknowledge the cries of "Author" (wearing a white satin tuxedo to reflect the glare of the spot light!) It was my triumph supreme—to be.

I still have the play. On bond paper it weighs five or six pounds and someday, when the disappointments of youth are no longer bitter, I shall have it pressed into a paper weight. It might—notice I say might—make a good paper weight.

David Wright O'Brien got me interested in pulp fiction and after a few bounces, JOHN BROWN'S BODY, a collaboration with him, clicked with AMAZING STORIES. Since that happy occasion I have sold a dozen or so pulp yarns, a few units of radio continuity and a couple of advertising ideas. Every time I receive a check, my older brother, Frank, an announcer for WJBC Bloomington, makes a point of mentioning it on his "Will Wonders Never Cease" program.

I like writing and think it the best of all positions.
(Concluded on page 145)



WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Quiz Page

Try your general science knowledge on these testers. Give yourself 2 points for each correct answer. If you score 50, you are quite okay, if 60, very clever, and if 70—oh my, you are a genius! Don't look now—but the answers are on page 146.

FILL 'ER UP!

- (1) Chromosomes are found in the
- (2) The great artery leading from the heart is named the
- (3) is the force that causes cars to swerve on rapid turns.
- (4) After a meteor has buried itself in the ground, it is called a
- (5) Red, blue, and yellow are known as the colors.
- (6) The on the hand corresponds to the big toe on the foot.
- (7) Rubber is taken from trees in the form of
- (8) The layers of soil and rock in the Earth are called
- (9) Gypsies are so called because they are thought to have originated in
- (10) The of the atom is its central core.
- (11) It takes about minutes for an ice cube to melt in the sunlight.
- (12) When an object makes invisible vibrations visible, it is said to be
- (13) The is a bird that doesn't fly, but wears a dress suit.
- (14) is the scientific name for "moon".
- (15) The most popular variety of pachyderm is the

TRUE OR FALSE

- (1) Flying fish are descendents of the bird family.
- (2) Andromeda is a star of the first magnitude.
- (3) A unique occurrence is called a phenomena.
- (4) Thunder is caused by lightning striking the ground.
- (5) Hair grows after death of a person.
- (6) Pineapple is a fruit in the apple family.
- (7) Constellations are groups of stars.
- (8) All of the enzymes are in the stomach and intestines.
- (9) Every planet has at least one satellite.
- (10) Oil is brought to the surface of the ground by osmosis.
- (11) Redwoods and sequoias are the world's oldest trees.

- (12) The galley is part of the printing press.
- (13) All canines are dogs.
- (14) Water cannot be compressed.
- (15) Orange is a mixture of yellow and red.

STRAY DATA

- (1) What is the Canadian equivalent for the American "state"?
- (2) What's the name for the stave of a wooden vessel that projects as a handle?
- (3) Does a stalagmite hang from the roof of a cave?
- (4) Is the eyeball a perfect sphere?
- (5) Which is the correct spelling: "traveled" or "travelled"?
- (6) What do we call an object that passes light, but no details of outline?
- (7) Is there such a thing as a three-wheeled bicycle?
- (8) What is the name given to a bridge that does not cross water?
- (9) Give the original name of India.
- (10) What word in the English language begins with "Q", not followed by "U"?
- (11) Is an atom smaller than a molecule?
- (12) What is dandruff?
- (13) What is the name for the wheel that runs along the wire, used by street-cars?
- (14) How many people have actually flown in rocket ships?
- (15) What part of a horse corresponds to our finger-nails?

THREE'S WRONG, WHAT'S RIGHT?

- (1) One of these discovered the first planet with the aid of a telescope:
Copernicus—Lowell—Herschel—Galileo.
- (2) The atomic table of elements is now complete, with the discovery of these two final elements:
Radium-actinium — illinium-rubidium — alabamine-virginium—ionium-solium.
- (3) Darwin was right in the following instance, that the human race most closely resembles:
Chimpanzee—gorilla—orang—gibbon.
- (4) They say necessity is the mother of invention, but one of the following great discoveries came purely by accident:
Radio—microscope—insulin—Bessemmer steel.
- (5) If you were working with a Bolometer, you would be engaged in:
Timing a star's pulsations—measuring minute quantities of radiant heat—the photography of solar eclipses—determining the voltage of electron-charges. (Answers on page 145.)

READER'S PAGE

McGIVERN MAKES A HIT

Sirs:

I may be a 12-year-old boy, but a 12-year-old can enjoy a good (and I do mean *good*) magazine. Your last issue of **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** is the best yet. I have attempted to list the stories in their proper order, and this is the result:

(1) "The Dynamouse." Superb! Best story I've ever read. Grand! Excellent!

(2) "The Horse That Talked." A very close second.

(3) "The Floating Robot." Same old "invader from outer space idea," but still good.

(4) "The Golden Amazon Returns." Not the best of the series, but it'll do.

(5) "The Vanishing Witnesses." Just a gangster story gone modern.

(6) "Dr. Kelton—Body Snatcher." Ho-hum. I suppose every magazine has its drawbacks.

Walter Tevis,
700 Franklin Ave.
Lexington, Ky.

The editors were truly amazed at the reception given to William P. McGivern's "The Dynamouse." Never has a humor story had such a reputation—but then, never has a fantasy-humorist had such a reception as this new writer has received, for all of his stories, both in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and our companion magazine, AMAZING STORIES.—Ed.

HE COMES BACK

Sirs:

This is the second time I have written to you. The first time I thought **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** was the best magazine put out; now I believe it more so than ever.

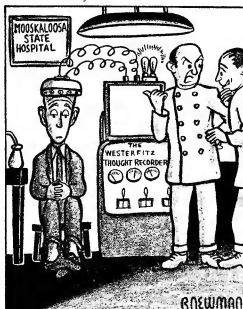
I am glad "Oscar" is coming back, because I like detective stories. But how about Lancelot Biggs?

And as for the continuation of the Amazon twins, I think it is one swell idea.

I think the story "The Horse That Talked" is really a swell story. Let's have more like them. "The Floating Robot" is a good story, but I cannot for the life of me get any sense out of it. Please explain how the Robot was brought into being and how it was destroyed. Oh! don't get me wrong. I read the story, but I just don't understand it.

Chesley Erickson,
406 N.E. 8th St.,
Amarillo, Texas.

There is a footnote in the robot story, which explains the robot was the materialization of all the radio broadcasts that have been pouring into the ether. Maybe you skipped the footnote? And its final end was dematerialization once more, by scrambling it up in the form or broadcasted radio waves; so that once more the robot is nothing but forever traveling radio waves, as it was in the beginning, before it attained concrete form through change of energy into matter, and coalesce into an intelligent being—intelligent because the radio broadcasts were the product of intelligences. Does this clear up your doubts?—Ed.



"No, the machine isn't broke, and he isn't thinking of absolute zero. He's a freshman on Yale's football team."

WE SQUARE THINGS UP

Sirs:

After waiting so long for a non-existent December issue of **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** to appear, I was afraid that the magazine had gone out of business. However, you squared things up with the January issue.

First of all, is H. W. McCauley's cover a masterpiece! The best cover **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** has ever had. You're sure to receive a lot of praise for it.

Leading by a big margin, David Wright O'Brien's "The Floating Robot" was the best story in the

issue. For a writer new to SF, O'Brien is swell. And he seems to be a storehouse of new and novel ideas. More by him, please.

Hamilton's talking horse galloped in at second place. This is the best piece of humor you have published since "The Wizard of Baseball." Jackson's illustration fitted perfectly, but Jackson's style seems out of place except for a humor-fantasy.

Thornton Ayre must have been hit by bomb shrapnel. His Golden Amazon yarn was terrible. Being married is bad enough for a hero and heroine, but dragging brats in to gum up the plot is plain hack.

The rest of the yarns were nothing to froth at the mouth about except perhaps "The Dynamouse." And before I forget, how about an article on U-235 in either FANTASTIC ADVENTURES or *Amazing Stories*?

In closing, I hope Burrough's yarn in the next issue is as good as the John Carter story in the January *Amazing*.

David Glazer,
12 Fowler St.,
Dorchester, Mass.

You're telling us! O'Brien continues to amaze us with his gift for new ideas. And considering he is a virtual amateur to this field, it makes us wonder how far he really will go. His story in this issue, although a short, is a time-travel tale with a new twist, and one we think the most bril-

liant idea since—well since!—Ed.

HE RATES' EM

Sirs:

I'm just dropping you a line to let you know what I think of your mag. You have a damn good cover! These guys that say they want the lettering in capital letters are nuts! It looks plenty good.

I rate the stories as follows:

- (1) "The Floating Robot."
- (2) "The Horse That Talked."
- (3) "The Vanishing Witnesses."
- (4) "The Dynamouse."
- (5) "Dr. Kelton—Body Snatcher."
- (6) "The Golden Amazon Returns."

I don't rate the last one at all; it was so lousy. In a previous issue "The Golden Amazon Fights Again" was also lousy.

Ed Terhovec,
37 Capistrano Ave.,
San Francisco, Calif.

So far, no dissenting votes on THAT cover. McCauley will be put to work on more very soon.—Ed.

LETTER FROM A LADY

Sirs:

The most enjoyable things in your magazine are "The Editor's Notebook," the cartoons, and the quiz.

The best stories in the January issue are: "The



THE CITY OF MUMMIES!

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Here is the strangest of all the stories of John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom. Always intriguing to the Prince of Helium are the dead cities of the sea bottoms, and especially so the City of Horz, most ancient of ancient ruins. Here lived the oldest race on Mars, the extinct white race. More than a million years had passed, and yet, deep in the pits of Horz John Carter began to doubt the reality of time. For there were mummies—strange, lifelike mummies whose flesh was soft and warm. Side-by-side with Llana of Gathol, his lovely granddaughter, and Pan Dan Chee, descendant of an incredibly ancient people, he faces the most amazing adventure of all in this great new novel by the one and only Edgar Rice Burroughs.

DON'T MISS THE MARCH ISSUE

AMAZING STORIES

NOW ON SALE At All Newsstands

on your part if fantastic hoaxes were sort of dropped, so to say, and something of interest was subtly inserted. It's finely carried out each issue, but the topics have just lost their punch.

All that can be overlooked in the face of the fact that there wasn't one single story which was below par in this New Year's issue! "The Floating Robot" had just enough edge to let David Wright O'Brien walk off with first honors—but *not* without a struggle! The one that put up the biggest fight, and was shoved into second place after a BIG fight with the following story, was McGivern's "The Dynamouse," the following story being Thornton Ayre's "The Golden Amazon Returns." It's a *shame* one can't have Fearn and Cross to round out the issue!

Keep up the good work 'cause I've gotten a hold on one finger and now want the whole hand. Do I like FANTASTIC ADVENTURES?

Why shore!

Joe J. Fortier.

D-U-D

Sirs:

This is the first letter I've ever written to F.A., and I'm darned sorry that it can't be a letter of praise. Your January issue, gentlemen, was a D-U-D!! I was looking forward to a masterpiece of humor in "The Horse That Talked," and what do I get? Some crazy yarn with about two chuckles in it. And as for "The Floating Robot"—it would have gone very well in a Love magazine. The emotions ran away with it! "The Amazon Fights Again" was the only decent story in the book, and "The Dynamouse" ranked about second. The rest aren't worth mentioning. F.A., and her sister mag. A.S. have always been the top ranking books in the business, and I'd like to keep my opinion where it is. Anyhow, I'm counting on "The Invisible Robinhood" and cute little "Oscar" to pull you out of this rut.

Roger Sklar,
1950 Andrews Avenue,
The Bronx, New York.

RIPPED FROM RIPON

Sirs:

You still cut out quite a bit of my last letter in defiance of my orders.

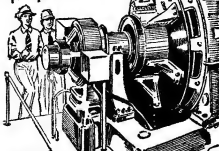
About the last three out of four of your feature stories were *foo* and "The Floating Robot" adds one more. It really would have made a very fine short-short story but when you try to stretch it into a "novel" it's too much. In the third place the story was too vague and indefinite. Why didn't O'Brien tell us more about where the robot came from? In the second place the story wasn't any good in the first place.

Other magazines seem to print feature novels which are okay, even AMAZING, why can't you?

"The Vanishing Witnesses" takes first ahead of the Amazon mainly because it would take quite a bit of work to put those lenses up and even then the rays would have to come to a focus

Will you be ready to fill one of the jobs calling for skilled men?

ACTUAL WORK ON
ACTUAL ELECTRICAL
MACHINERY



TRAIN FOR A BETTER JOB IN
ELECTRICITY
12 WEEKS SHOP TRAINING

AMERICA NEEDS TRAINED MEN

Our big defense program and industrial expansion is creating thousands of NEW jobs. Are YOU prepared? Now is the time to get YOUR training in Electricity—the power that makes the whole program possible. Electricity is the power behind the program.



"LEARN BY DOING"

Here at Coyne you can get 12 weeks' practical shop training on real electrical machinery. You learn airplane ignition, do house-wiring, learn power plant operation, etc. You "Learn By Doing", not by books. You don't need previous experience or advanced education, and you don't need much money for —

FIN Finance Your Training

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before they could cause much damage, and by doing that there would be only a very small area that would receive the full strength of the rays.

The rest of the stories were just about the same, except for "The Floating Robot", which was so bad that it doesn't even rate a place!

There is another fan in town who disagrees with just about everything I have written here, but so what? Opinions do differ!!!

Wallace Buchholz,
330 Spaulding Ave.,
Ripon, Wis.

WHAT'S THIS?

Sirs:

Mr. Buchholz's letter in the January issue made what serves for my blood *boil*! When he says that you cut out parts of letters to make them sound "sweet" he is way off. In fact, yours is the only magazine which *doesn't* do that!!

Seeing that this is my first letter to any magazine, I don't know whether I am qualified to judge the stories or not but here goes:

"The Floating Robot" takes first by a mile. I don't know what it is but your novels have that certain *something* which tops novels in all other mags.

Lewis', McGivern's and Hamilton's stories were pretty much the same.

"The Golden Amazon" takes fifth because I don't like women heroes in S-F. Women, fokey!!!

"The Vanishing Witnesses" takes last. I don't believe in time-traveling stories and this (though it wasn't a time-traveling story) didn't help change my opinion.

Anon E. Mouse,
Ripon, Wis.

P.S. You can see that the above is not my name, but I do not wish it known.

Your letter is very interesting, Mr. Mouse. But aren't you taking a delicate, or not so delicate, dig at us, by writing contrasting letters? Yes, we do cut from letters, and we've given the reason many times. No one is arguing the point. And yes, opinions differ, and we print both sides of the question; but NOT, as you hint, just to cast aspersions on either one or the other opinion. But really, we feel rather flattered to know that your interest in us is such that you give us so much attention. We hope you'll write another letter for our next issue, really putting us on the fire, if that's where we belong. We want to know what you readers want *FANTASTIC* to be, so that we can make it that way!!—Ed.

UMSCRACIOUS

Sirs:

I'm so astounded, I can't even spell. I'm spell-bound. McCauley's cover was—er—er—umscracious. Figure out the meaning for yourself. Boy-o-boy, I thought the Golden Princess cover was excellent. This one was super-excellent. It does not resemble his attempts on the back cover of *Amazing*. Give us more covers by Mac.

Wm. P. McGivern stole the last issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES with his hilarious short, *The Dynamouse*. This is the sort of way I like U-235 to be dealt with. Mother is still sewing the sides of my shirt. *The Floating Robot* is one of O'Brien's worst tales. Good stories he is capable of, but where in the 'ell did this one pop up from? Edmond Hamilton's attempt at hilarity was g-o-o-d in spots, but b-a-d in others. Dr. Kelton and Lewis would have done better to vanish. The Amazon, after having some swell stories written about her, would have done better to stay on Venus. Bring her kids back, however. Now I've come to the remaining story, *The Vanishing Witnesses*. Ross Rocklynn has woven a very fine short, and should be congratulated for copping second place. On the whole, the stories were fair, not as good as the preceding issue.

Carson Coming!! Gosh, I've got something to live for! Can't wait for the next F. A. McCauley, Burroughs, Oscar, and—who wants any more? Not me.

You asked in the readers' section if you left out panning letters. It seems to me that I have not seen a real critical letter in Discussions. Probably this one won't get in, even in part, because of its mild criticism. I say, there have been few, if any, critical letters in F. A.

Harry Jenkins,
2409 Santee Ave.,
Columbia, S. C.

The editors have been amazed by the difference in opinion on David Wright O'Brien's "The Floating Robot." Either it received cheers, or boos. We are beginning to wonder if this was a very good story, or a very bad one. It's the first time we've been at a loss to classify the story, and place it in its proper listing in the month's ratings. According to mathematics, it comes about third or fourth, in the middle somewhere, but how can you use mathematics on a story like that?

Carson sure is coming, to mangle my grammar. He's in this issue, and you'll see him no less than three times more in future issues. The finest feast of adventure fiction by the old master that's been presented in years! But say, don't miss the John Carter stories now running in our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories*! They're tops too.

I don't know how you can continue to say we are partial in this department. If you'll pick out the critical letters in past issues, we wager you'll find a bigger percentage of kicks than you imagine, although we'll admit we do have to be partial, insofar as percentage of the whole is concerned, in picking enough critical letters to make an impression in the column. Our critical letters are something of a rarity.—Ed.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES invites your comment. Why not drop us a line, and whether published or not, give us your opinion of our stories and features? That's how we decide on future issues.

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QUIZ ANSWERS*(Quiz on page 137)***FILL 'ER UP!**

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| (1) genes | (9) Egypt |
| (2) aorta | (10) nucleus |
| (3) inertia | (11) thirty |
| (4) meteoroid | (12) phosphorescent |
| (5) complimentary | (13) penguin |
| (6) thumb | (14) satellite |
| (7) sap | (15) elephant |
| (8) stratas | |

TRUE OR FALSE

- | | |
|-----------|------------|
| (1) False | (9) True |
| (2) False | (10) False |
| (3) False | (11) True |
| (4) False | (12) False |
| (5) True | (13) True |
| (6) False | (14) True |
| (7) True | (15) True |
| (8) False | |

STRAY DATA

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| (1) Province | (9) Hindustan |
| (2) piffin | (10) none |
| (3) no | (11) yes |
| (4) no | (12) dried scalp |
| (5) either | (13) trolley |
| (6) translucent | (14) no one |
| (7) no | (15) hoof |
| (8) viaduct | |

THREE'S WRONG, WHAT'S RIGHT?

- (1) Herschel.
- (2) Alabamine-virginium.
- (3) Chimpanzee.
- (4) Bessemer steel.
- (5) Measuring minute quantities of radiant heat.

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR*(Concluded from page 136)*

sible ways to provide for cakes and ale. I have a few hobbies which I don't let worry me and about the only things I don't like are current headlines and interventionists.

Firmly believe that the selective service drawing was the most impartial, intelligent, thoroughly fair and just method that could have been devised. Just think—they had to draw over eight thousand numbers before they got to mine. Verily *fiat justitia ruat coelum!*

Physically I am just a bit on the large size. My detractors point scornfully to my two hundred and ten pounds and cry "tub!" But I stoutly maintain that it is merely loose muscle.

Glancing over this little gem I find little enough justification for having written this far and none at all for writing any farther, so with your permission I'll just say, thirty.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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William Allen White
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Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1914, and March 3, 1933, of *Fantastic Adventures*, published bi-monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1940. State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, depose and says that he is the business manager of *Fantastic Adventures* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1914, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 547, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to-wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, W. B. Ziff, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago; Editor, B. G. Davis, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago; Managing Editor, Ray Palmer, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago; 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago; W. B. Ziff Co., 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago; W. B. Ziff, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago; B. G. Davis, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago; 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and all other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is . . . (This information is required from daily publications only.) A. T. Pullen, Business Manager. (Signature of editor, publisher, business manager, or owner.) Sworn to and subscribed before me this 21st day of October, 1940. [Seal.] M. Gnass, Notary Public. (My commission expires February 26, 1944.)

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